THE BOOKS OF HISTORY

JOHN H. HICKS

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A Guide for Bible Readers

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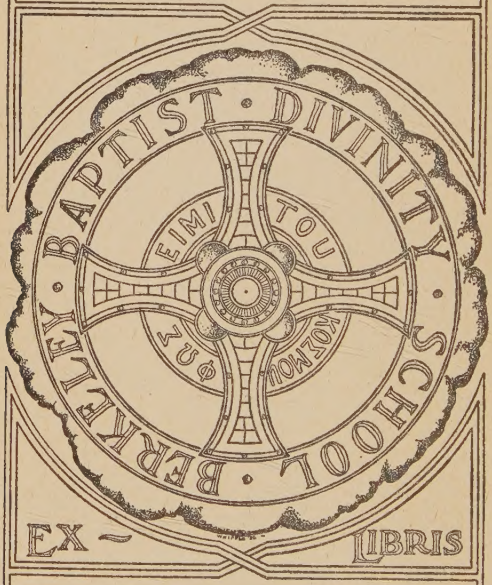

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A GUIDE FOR BIBLE READERS

Edited by Harris Franklin Rall

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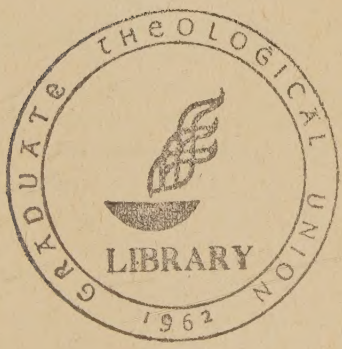

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THIS volume is intended to help the reader who wishes to know the Bible at first hand. The way to know a country is to visit it and travel through it, not just to read about it. But a good guide can help. He can lead to places of greatest interest and can give information needed for understanding what is seen. The Bible is a great and wonderful country. It is not one book but many books—books in which many voices join, and whose story stretches through many centuries. Its writings differ widely in character, as do the mountains and valleys, the rivers and seacoasts, the cities and plains, of a wide country like ours. At the same time, they have a real unity. They have one source, the Spirit of God moving upon the hearts of men. They have a living center, Jesus of Nazareth. We call the Bible the Word of God, and with good reason, for it comes out of the word which God spoke to these writers "by divers portions and in divers manners," and through it God speaks to us today.

All of us know some parts of the Bible quite well—a chapter here, a verse there, certain psalms learned perhaps in childhood, and some parts of the New Testament. But we all need wider acquaintance with the Bible, and truer understanding and larger appreciation of its wealth of moral and spiritual meaning.

This book is one of eight Guides planned for the purpose of leading to this broader knowledge. The authors have been chosen because of their training in Bible study and their experience in teaching. Four of the books are given to the Old Testament, four to the New. Many of the less

important parts of the Bible have of necessity been omitted. The Guides go with the reader on his journey through these writings. They stimulate interest and understanding. They introduce the writer and indicate the time, place, purpose, and special character of the writing. Chapter by chapter, they help the student to discover the meanings and values in the Bible, especially for the personal religious life. Since these Guides will be used largely by ministers, attention is given to material for sermons; but the lay reader will find them equally helpful. Each book is intended to serve for a six months' period. Four or five *Readings* should be completed each week.

Here are some *rules for Bible reading* whose observance will pay rich dividends:

1. Read with a definite purpose and expectation: to understand what is written; to gain quickening of thought and enlargement of mind and vision; to get personal help for good living; and, above all, to meet God and to hear his voice. These are great ends; whether they are reached will rest with each student.

2. Bring all that you have to your reading. What you get will depend on what you bring. Especially, bring a sympathetic imagination. You will not be reading dead words. They came out of life. Try to enter into that life of the past: into the faith of a psalmist and his trials and hopes, the appeal of a prophet speaking to a nation, the witness of Paul, the full heart of the Evangelists. Occasional reading aloud will help make the words live. Bring also an attentive and inquiring mind. Read slowly, pause, reflect, always seeking the real meaning.

3. Read in the spirit of prayer. Offer a prayer as you begin. Ask for the light which God's Spirit can give. Lift up your heart to God and ask God to come to you.

4. Read in the spirit of obedience. Ask what the passage means for your own life and pray for grace to follow what is thus revealed. "Apply thyself wholly to the Bible; apply the Bible wholly to thyself." (Bengel.)

In this course are frequent references to *ABC,* which means *The Abingdon Bible Commentary,* a commentary on the Old and New Testaments which contains many interesting articles on the Bible as a whole as well as an article on each book of the Bible. The purchase of this book is recommended to the lay reader, who will find it most interesting and helpful. For the minister who is studying these Guides it is indispensable.

The student will find that keeping a notebook from day to day as he reads will prove of great value.

HARRIS FRANKLIN RALL

FOREWORD

THIS volume is one of a series of eight Guides for Bible Readers. The four volumes on the O.T., of which this is the second, treat respectively the four divisions which we find in our English Bible: the Books of the Law (Gen.-Deut.); the Books of History (Josh.-Esth.); the Prophets (Isa., Jer., Ezek., Hos.-Mal.); and the Books of Poetry and Wisdom (Job-Songs, Lam.)

The order and arrangement of books in the Hebrew Bible was different from that in the English Bible. It had three groups of books, or rolls: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings; and this was for the Hebrews the order of importance, the Law being the most sacred. Some years before Christ this Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek because the Jews of that day, already scattered through the Greco-Roman world, had lost the knowledge of Hebrew and, with the rest of the world, used Greek. Those who translated the Scripture into Greek arranged the books in the order familiar to us. Because the early Christians used this Greek translation, its order has been followed since then in the Christian church.

Our O.T. Books of History have enduring value; they are more than a mere tale of past events. Ours is a religion of history. We believe in a living God who works in history and who reveals himself by what he does. So the Hebrews believed. They wrote the story of their nation in order to show what God had done. They halted along the way not only to view what had taken place but to grasp what God through these happenings was saying to them and to the nation. To trace the purpose and will of God was the great work of the prophets and the writers of the Books of History. They were no mere chroniclers: they were prophets. And what they wrote is of deep interest and abiding value to us Christians, who are also heirs of this great tradition.

Two things become plain as we read the Books of History. One is that the writers did not always agree in their understand-

ing of events; the other is that there was real progress in their understanding. They all believed that God was acting in their history, but they did not all understand his purposes in the same way. They started on a low level, and we are shocked at some of the ideas and practices they set down. But always there were those whose hearts were open to the Spirit of God, who had truer insights than those about them and saw more deeply into the realities of life. There was progress in their insights; gradually men understood God better and gained a truer conception of the way of life as God willed it.

We need not be surprised at either the low beginnings or the high insights to which they came. This is God's way with men. His method is that of training; his revelation is through life. He starts with men on the low level where he finds them and moves up from there. Jesus recognized this when he rejected the lower standards, even though they were expressed in the Law, and set before the people a higher way. "Ye have heard . . . ," he said, "but I say unto you . . ." (Mt. 5:38-39).

One is never aware of all the sources of his thinking or of all who have helped in his work; but some of my indebtedness is so plain as to call for acknowledgment. I am grateful to William K. Anderson and the Commission on Ministerial Training for the privilege of participating in the work of this series of Guides. To President Umphrey Lee of Southern Methodist University I am indebted for his constant emphasis on the ideals of sound scholarship, dependable writing, and service to people. I wish to thank the editor of this series, Harris Franklin Rall, for his aid as a patient, considerate, and suggestive guide.

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CONTENTS

I. Joshua 15
II. Judges 31
III. Ruth 44
IV. First and Second Samuel 48
V. First and Second Kings 91
VI. First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah 142
VII. Esther 157

I

JOSHUA

THE book of Joshua bears the name of its hero rather than its author; Joshua was an adventurer, a leader, not a writer. This book is intimately connected with the five books which go before it, the Books of the Law. It is a direct continuation of the historical portion of those books, taking up the story of Israel's history where the book of Numbers drops it—the death of Moses intervening—and describing the changing fortunes of the Israelites from there to the death of Joshua. In fact, the book of Judges furnishes the climax to the historical narrative in the Books of the Law—the possession of the Promised Land. The six books are one in carrying a continuous story to its realized goal.

The book of Joshua was hundreds of years in the making. It took its present form long after the invasion and its accomplishments. In the late Persian period, soon after 400 B.C., some able Jewish writer or compiler, faced with the issues of the depression that followed the return from exile, combined the literary inheritance of his nation into a work of tremendous sweep. He was trying to bring the values of the past to bear on the needs of his own day. The history of that past was enriched by his people's conquest of the Promised Land. "From sources and forces many centuries older" this priestly writer combined the existing literary portions on the whole period of the conquest into what we now know as the book of Joshua. Materials from various sources, written by many hands, with numerous differences in their accounts and with divergent conceptions of the conquest, were used freely. The prophetic sources of both northern and southern Canaan, as well as the priestly documents, had their share in the book's final composition, although we cannot at this late date know the exact form in which the separate portions were preserved. Soon this combined story was added to what was later known as the Book of the Law, and this larger body

of literature, Genesis to Joshua, became a potent religious and legal factor in the life of the postexilic community. As this single work was put on scrolls and translated into Greek it was divided into six parts, each with an appropriate name. These names are the titles of our first six books of the Bible.

The material for the book of Joshua was arranged in three parts: the first deals with the invasion and conquest of Canaan (chs. 1-12); the second gives a detailed account of the distribution of the territory among the various tribes (chs. 13-21); and the third section recounts the final acts and closing speeches of Joshua (chs. 22-24). Although the work as a whole is horrible with bloodshed and indiscriminate slaughter, it has numerous excellent and vivid stories which merit full consideration.

Reading 1: Joshua 1

PREPARATIONS FOR THE INVASION OF CANAAN

As you read thoughtfully 1:1-9, consider the character and equipment of Joshua for the leadership of his people. What were his chief personal qualities (vv. 5-6), and by whom and how was he prepared for his work (vv. 2, 9)? What conditions prevailed in Canaan when the Hebrews came into it? Consider *ABC*, p. 346*a*. What preparations were made for this invasion into Canaan? Let your answer be concerned with the leader, the supplies, and the allied groups as you read carefully vv. 10-18.

Joshua was the proper person to follow Moses. He was prepared to lead the children of Israel forward in the difficult task before them. His contacts with Moses and his experience in life had given him rich insights. These had awakened in him a sense of mission, set before him a definite goal, and given him assurance of God's guidance and support (v. 5). His maturing experience had enriched his life with worthy personal qualities and established his devotion to high ideals (v. 8).

In many ways the civilization in Canaan surpassed that of the incoming Hebrews. In numbers, organization, vigor, and equipment the Canaanites were far superior to the invaders. Canaan seemed wonderfully fertile to the Hebrews. Its valleys rich in grains and fruits, its skilled craftsmen, its many articles of luxury—all were strange to these Israelites from the desert. Caravans of commerce and industry, coming from afar on regular roads through settled communities, filled with awe these in-

vaders who had roamed the ranges at will. The complex new social, economic, and religious conditions confronted this group in their simple life with dangers hitherto unknown. Before the invasion of such a land the stoutest of hearts would hesitate; for the people were vigorous, the civilization was advanced, the armaments were destructive and the fortifications strong.

But the invasion from the viewpoint of the Hebrews had its favorable aspect. Canaan was small and it lacked cohesion. In reality it was not a "country" at all; it was only a group of loosely federated areas. Not even the stress of invasion could draw the separate Canaanites together in a common interest. Even the larger areas of the central ranges, long free from Egypt, were weakly organized, and some of them thinly settled. On the other hand, Moses had left the invaders compact and enthusiastic. They were determined and united in effort. Before them as a challenge were the dare of adventure and the prize of achievement. The task before Joshua was hard, but not hopeless.

The job was one demanding the best of preparation. Worthy accomplishments do not just happen. They come from able efforts. Moses and Joshua had told the people that their God would "give" them the land, but they had to take possession of it before they could claim it as their own. The gift from God, in the thinking of these leaders, was only an opportunity to conquer. To realize the full potentialities of this gift, the people must move through all the borders of the land and remold all its life. This called for heroism and devotion, and with high courage Joshua turned to hearten his fellow adventurers. For such a military enterprise there were numerous essentials: suitable headquarters, accurate plans, brave allies, able officers, adequate rations and supplies, and sufficient time for molding loyalty in concerted action (v. 16).

Reading 2: Joshua 2

THE SPIES AND THEIR COMPACT WITH RAHAB

Fix in mind clearly the position of Jericho and of Joshua's headquarters. Determine what political conditions prevailed in Jericho at that time (v.3) and decide whether these helped or hindered the entrance of the Hebrews (see *ABC*, p. 347*a*). Why did the invaders send spies into Jericho, and why did these go to the house of Rahab (vv. 1-2)? Account for the praise of

Rahab. Was this due to her life or deeds? Explain and account for the compact which the spies made with Rahab. Was Rahab a traitor to her own people, and were the spies free from blame in this matter? Was such treachery justifiable by the ideals of that age (vv. 12-14)? Try to understand the religious ideas and practices reflected in this story (vv. 9-10, 11b).

Each of the chief Canaanite cities had its own king or ruler. Each city acted for itself. There was no charter of unity among the various centers, not even for protection. Only a few miles across from Jericho was the camp of the enemy, whose eyes were fixed on "all the land." Had there been a confederation of the kings of that land, the task for the incoming horde would have been much more difficult. But, as it was, each city stood in dread and its people lost heart before the rising clouds of invasion.

The visit of the spies reflected the designs of the Hebrews. They needed additional information on prevailing conditions. Had the Canaanites discovered their plans? What feeling toward them existed among the masses? Were they enraged and confident, or were they disturbed and fearful? Were any important details on fortifications and defense measures available? Joshua wanted a reliable, firsthand report.

It was no accident that the spies entered the house of Rahab. Men were coming into her quarters constantly, and these men were not likely to be regarded as political spies; her place afforded a pretext for their presence. She was under no ban for her profession, for she was among people without high morals. Her life in kindness and service ranked high in that early period. At the risk of life she cast her lot with the Hebrews and their God. By her words, her deeds, and her faith she expressed such loyalty thereto that long afterward she was counted among the heroes of faith (see Heb. 11:31).

Rahab did more than just protect the spies in her house. She definitely aided in the capture of Jericho. She not only received and treated these men kindly but also expressed confidence in the success of their mission and urged a compact with them. Rahab and her clan may have been related to or allied with the invaders. We know that she demanded, in return for her help, protection for herself and her relatives at the fall of the city. Whether she planned to open a gate of the city, or organize a band of deserters, or commit some other hostile act is not clear.

She offered and secured assurance of deliverance and protection. The scarlet thread was more than a mark of designation. It was the mutual pledge of loyal hearts in a common cause believed to be the plan of God. In that far-off age we observe both treachery and loyalty, enemies and allies. Today we still wait for the time when all people shall become allies, when treachery shall give place to human brotherhood, and the ways of God shall be as plain as the house marked with scarlet.

Rahab assured the spies that she was acquainted with their God, believed in his power, and was aware of Israel's successes in his name. The ideas of God reflected in this incident are primitive and the concepts of the good life limited. The people of that day believed that God sanctioned the ban, or consecration by destruction (v. 10); fostered deceit (v. 16); and approved of treachery (v. 4). Israel still retained many of the crude ideas, if not magical practices, belonging to the earlier stages of religion. But the loftier conceptions with their transforming power were not lacking. Loyalty within groups; a sense of obligation among allies; complete confidence in Israel's God, in the certainty of his purpose for his own, and in the ultimate triumph of that purpose—these too were a part of the religious atmosphere back of the story. Surely the revelation of God is progressive and the cruder ways of men fade out through the dawn of new insights in the ongoing processes of our God!

Reading 3: Joshua 3–4

THE CROSSING OF THE JORDAN AND ITS COMMEMORATION AT GILGAL

Account for the successful passage of the Jordan by the invading group. Read the comments of *ABC* on ch. 3 (pp. 347-48). Picture this army and the order in the march to and across the Jordan. How does God reveal his purpose to mankind, and how can man make sure of divine guidance? Are the purposes of God portrayed in the common affairs of life, or only in its supreme and spectacular events? After careful study of ch. 4 suggest the best ways of preserving the work of God and man. What are the most fitting and enduring memorials?

The events connected with the crossing of the Jordan were regarded as highly important by the Hebrews. Poets and storytellers loved to recount such episodes, for they disclosed the

course by which the people had come into their national home and made clear to them God's part in this procedure. Separate accounts of the crossing of the Jordan have been combined in this story. The earliest one (cf. 3:1, 5, 9, 11, 13) is straightforward and simple. It presents Joshua assuring the people of God's aid in their emergency, and states that something took place up the river at an opportune time, perhaps a landslide forming a temporary dam that enabled the Israelites to get across. The later narrative (cf. 3:7-8; 4:10, 14) has magnified the part played by the priests and the sacred ark and has idealized Joshua. The earlier account is as reverent as the later one. But the chief point in each account is that the people saw God in their history and believed that he had in a remarkable way favored the Hebrew people in their emergency. This event and its circumstances gave them evidence of God's care and guidance. Unless the purposes of God enter into the simple affairs of daily life and come to light in the events of history, unless the best urges of our spirits can be trusted, God has no way of making himself understood. In and through our responses to these disclosures of himself and his work we sense his presence and become sure of his guidance in our lives. Then the emergencies of life do not overwhelm us but afford us new assurances of God, enabling us to face hard tasks with faith and patience.

Crossing the Jordan required more than a favorable time. Able leaders, adequate plans, detailed organization, and hearty and united response on the part of the people contributed to its ultimate realization. The advance was regarded as an act of God, and for such the people must prepare themselves by ablutions and restraints. Their garments and their bodies must be ceremonially clean, and they must abstain from all matters considered unclean. Officers moving among the people served to strengthen the morale and to make clear the proper course of action. Their "Leave your position and follow [the ark]" (3:3*b* —American Trans.) brought as much lift of spirit as Dewey's "Steam ahead" at Manila, or Nelson's "England expects every man to do his duty" at Trafalgar.

The pile of stones at Gilgal, which had been taken from the Jordan, served as a symbol. It called to mind an act of God. It centered attention on a worthy experience of the past. It kept alive the courage and response of a people in that experience.

It memorialized a significant achievement. Memorials are more than monuments; they keep alive from generation to generation the great experiences of life. One age contributes its highest values to another, just as parents would have the essential things of their lives pass on to their children. To single out essential and valuable achievements, and set up enduring reminders of these, merits our approval. But when we consider the purpose of memorials, we realize that lives surpass monuments for keeping fresh and vital that which we do not wish to pass away. Our best memorials are those that function in life and foster the principles by which we live at our best.

Written Work.—Indicate the text and give the main points in the outline of a sermon which you would preach to your people on one of these two subjects: "Meeting Life's Emergencies" (3:10-17), or "Memorials That Last" (4:5-24).

Reading 4: Joshua 5:13–6:27

THE CAPTURE OF JERICHO

In reading this account remember what was said above about the writing of the book of Joshua. The author had collected old stories about these great events. His concern was not with details of history; he was "preaching faith, not drawing diagrams." Study with care the instructions on the conquest given in 6:1-7. Be clear on the order of the march and the plan of attack. Can you explain the cause and the manner of the city's fall? Was its capture due to miracle, to strategy, or to treachery? After reading 6:17 to 6:26 explain to some church school leader the difference in a ban and a curse in Hebrew thinking. What is your view of the harsh action in 6:21?

The fall of Jericho has been a general favorite among the stories of the O.T. Excavations assure us of Jericho's fall. "The fire-scarred ruins testify to the destruction of this city and its fallen walls bear mute witness to the invading host." (Carl S. Knopf, *The O. T. Speaks.*) The conquest of this city by the Hebrews is sober history, and we should distinguish between this fact of history and the explanation of the cause and method of the city's overthrow. This explanation was the interpretation of those who stood in the presence of the impressive fact. In their thinking the purposes of God showed up in the affairs of life, and this happy event supplied their faith with meaning and strength.

Joshua's experience with the captain (5:13-15) is similar to that of Moses at the outset of his mission (Ex. 3:2-5). A true sense of God and his protection always begets reverence and noble humility. One does more than stand on "holy ground"—he worships and gets his bearings. "In the great causes of God upon earth, the leaders . . . are themselves led. There is a rock higher than they; their shoulders, however broad, have not to bear alone the awful burden of responsibility." (G. A. Smith.)

Joshua's plan of attack had its merits. His instructions were given; and the orderly march of the armed men, the priests, the ark, and the rearguard was set in motion. The strategy revealed in the old narrative seemed to catch the watchmen of the city off guard. The march around the city on the first day found its defenders alert and strong. But Joshua's men made no effort to attack. As the days passed, however, alarm gave way to ridicule and scorn. Israel's continued march with no effort at battle left the people of Jericho thinking that they did not dare to attack. With this mood came a laxity of defense. The gates were no longer guarded, and this was Israel's opportunity for attack. Perhaps this trick was aided by the family of Rahab within the city, as previously arranged by the spies; if so, treachery supported strategy. At the proper signal the gates were unbolted and the way was opened for the sudden attack by the soldiers. However, the belief in the miraculous falling of the walls has been preserved in a portion of the story, which states that the walls fell down of themselves at the blast of the trumpets by the priests as they encompassed the city for the seventh time on a single day. Whether the story has its basis in psychology, geology, or theology, the Hebrews viewed the historical fact as an act of God. But the method by which the fortified city was captured must remain in the dark at this late date. We can never know whether the "strong wall" that fell down "in its place" was a wall of men or of stone. This may be a figurative way of expressing the surprising ease with which the city was taken. The one viewing the walls as literal still has room to think of earthquake and quaking masonry, or of Rahab and secretly opened gates, or of weary defenders and resistless desert attackers. The essential thing is that the biblical writer with warm faith is here presenting his picture of an ancient triumph, using the thought patterns of his own day. We miss his purpose,

destroy his meaning, and overextol his method when we try to fit the patterns of his thinking into those of our own. The explanations of a world filled with beliefs in the magic of the sacred ark, the power of a united shout, and the objective working of a curse differ from those of a scientific age.

Both the ban and the curse functioned in the faith of the people of Jericho. A ban meant that a place and all its contents were "devoted" to the Lord. To destroy every living thing and all valuable property in a conquered town was considered by the Hebrews an act of merit. Thereby the victors renounced in favor of their God all the spoils that they might have taken for themselves. Too, such was thought to please the deity. Therein his loathing of the enemy was satisfied. The Hebrew "curse" lifted up a wish of misfortune against the person guilty of some unworthy act. In time this wish would come to pass unless the person abstained from the act. A curse which had been invoked fulfilled itself of its own accord. To destroy all the life and property of a city and pronounce a curse preventing its rebirth seems harsh indeed. Military necessity, primitive cruelty, or other ways of divine punishment are inadequate expressions of this. The Hebrews thought cruelty and vindictiveness were required by God. Wholesale slaughter of foes was supposed to win divine approval. Christian teaching is radically opposed to all this. But we need to remember that people may be crude and wrong in their religious conceptions, and yet worthy of appreciation for their intense and unselfish devotion.

Reading 5: Joshua 7

THE SIN OF ACHAN

How account for the defeat of the Israelites at Ai? Are defeats in battle ever due to moral causes? Are all calamities due to sin. After careful study of vv. 10-26 give a clear and simple explanation of Achan's sin. Was the Hebrew method of detecting the guilty person a reliable one? Consider the merits of the Hebrew sense of group as against individual responsibility and record your conclusions in your notebook.

The invasion of Canaan by the Hebrews was a signal success. Jericho, heavily fortified and well defended, had been taken with comparative ease. The victory was complete and vital. The ability of the Hebrews in battle was plain. Joshua and his men

became confident—overconfident. The near-by town of Ai, perched on the western edge of the great central range, was in the path of the invaders and had to be taken. Joshua with his great confidence considered a detachment of the army sufficient for the task. To his amazement the expedition failed.

For the Hebrews disaster always meant divine displeasure, and God's displeasure was due to some violation of his will. Similarly, when good came their way it was taken as a sign of God's approval. That applied to war, to drought and rain, to famine and plenty, to disease and health. Today we inquire as to natural causes and try to correct wrong conditions; they did not think of this. Yet there was a deep truth in their conviction which we today are too much inclined to overlook. What a nation believes and how it lives and whether it obeys God's laws makes all the difference in the world as to each of these matters.

Achan's sin was not untypical of soldier life. The second World War gave abundant illustration on both sides. In that early day booty was the soldier's source of pay—he had no regular wage, as now. The Babylonian cloak, comparable to a Paris gown in our day, the shekels of silver, and the bar of gold had a high value and could be easily concealed. Their appeal was too much for Achan to resist.

For the Hebrews this was no common theft. Ai, with its people and its goods, was "devoted"—that is, it had been set apart for God. The people, men and women, young and old, were to be put to the sword and everything was to be destroyed except certain precious articles which were to go to "the house of Jehovah." This was a common belief and practice. We find a similar provision in the Babylonian code of Hammurabi eight centuries earlier, requiring death for one who stole from a temple—that is, from the god.

Measured by Christian standards, all this seems primitive and even pagan. When we devote material goods to God it is for use, not destruction; and the indiscriminate slaughter of the people of a whole city is to us the depth of barbarism. So, too, the putting to death of Achan's entire family. There is a truth in the idea of social solidarity; we live not only as individuals but as families and communities and nations. And with this social solidarity goes social responsibility; the group has a measure of responsibility for what its members do. But to put

to death a whole company for the sin of one man is to us utterly indefensible. Equally foreign to us is the idea that a guilty person can be found by lot—which seems to have been Joshua's plan.

Reading 6: Joshua 8

THE CAPTURE OF AI

By what startegy was Ai captured? Does defeat ever make for victory? Is discipline important in victory? Try to join sympathetically in the service at the altar of Mount Ebal (vv. 30-35). Note the various acts and participants of this service.

The tactics employed in taking Ai are not foreign to the warfare of our own day. The method involved striking terror into the minds of the enemy, conquering by strategy as well as by the sword. The device used by the nomadic invaders at Ai was simple. Through a unified plan, co-ordinated effort, and discipline they set a trap which drew the enemy away from its central quarters toward distant attackers. This opened the way for soldiers to drop behind and apply the pincer movement.

The defeat of the first attempt against Ai was not accepted as final. Instead, it stimulated to action, to preparation, discipline, and ultimate triumph. The qualities used here in war could and should be turned into constructive channels. Your own shortcomings and failures could be used to bring new courage to your heart and to bestir you to try again for that better, fuller life which you have missed. Your own life and the work of your church could be improved through plan, effort, and discipline.

It is possible the altar which Joshua built at Mount Ebal, at which he and the people worshiped, was erected much later than the battle of Ai. In any case, this passage constitutes a real thanksgiving service, whether this gratitude had its source in the Ai victory or in the later entrance of Israel into the land. But it is important that we sense the gratitude to God which expressed itself here in worship, and that we realize more clearly how Israel found the will of God in his law.

Reading 7: Joshua 9–10

THE CONQUEST OF SOUTHERN CANAAN

Study the story of the Gibeonites (9:3-27) for its main features. Decide the cause and basis of the treaty between Joshua and the Gibeonites. Are agreements between parties always bind-

ing? How do we decide what our obligations are? Compare Josh. 9:16f.; Psa. 15:4; and Mt. 5:33-37. Is the spoken word as binding as the written? Are simple statements as valuable as those made under oath? Do compacts for evil ever merit sanction? What worthy religious ideas are brought out by this story?

Note that the poem on the sun and moon (10:12-13) contains a quotation from the lost book of Jashar. With the aid of *ABC* (p. 351*b*) find the key to the meaning of this famous passage.

There had long been clashing interests among the various groups in Canaan. Fear of the invading Hebrews began to spread over the country. Under such conditions the Gibeonites became the allies of the Hebrews. Security and self-interest furnished the basis for the treaty. But true allies are unselfish toward each other. A sense of brotherhood prevails and calls for a relationship as broad and inclusive as the principles of justice and right. Deceptive and false agreements are not lasting. There is a frank and honorable way for ending such commitments. We are obligated to truth and right. Regard for oaths and treaties is essential in social intercourse. Unless the word of men and nations can be trusted we have no dependable way of living together. Unworthy contracts and compacts for evil should be turned into pledges for the good of all.

The whole southern campaign is presented in the light of "what was true here and there" in it. A generalized account of Joshua's success is recounted. It is told in order to emphasize certain important ideas. It stresses sublime faith in God, makes clear his purpose for the nation, and declares the sure triumph of that purpose. The one telling this story believed that God was an ultimate factor in all victories. The Canaanites were subdued, not completely destroyed. The Hebrews were severe on their captives, often slaying them mercilessly. This slaughter the Hebrews justified in their own way. They must halt the enemy of God, and this, not wholesale destruction, was their aim.

Only the quotation of 10:12-13 and one other (2 Sam. 1:18) survive from the book of Jashar. That book seems to have contained a collection of early Hebrew ballads on the "upright"—the meaning of the Hebrew word "Jashar." The book dealt with the upright ones, and these may have been the nation, her heroes, or God. This four-line quotation from Jashar receives its meaning from its setting. It is a fervent prayer, not an astronomical re-

port on the sun; a poetic expression of great emotion, not a scientific declaration. By sudden attack and storm an unbelievable victory has come to the Hebrews. The enemy has been completely routed, and the poem emphasizes this fact. It is not a stop-watch record of astronomy but the Hebrew's way of saying that the impossible has been achieved. Too much has happened for one day. In the tension of battle time has stood still, as it were, and waited for victory.

Reading 8: Joshua 11–12

THE CONQUEST OF NORTHERN CANAAN AND THE INVASION AS A WHOLE

Read this passage as a whole for its picture of life in Palestine. Observe the primitive features of that period, such as indulging in cruel banter, standing on the necks of kings, hanging corpses, hamstringing horses, burning cities, and slaying refugees by wholesale. Was this conduct of God's ordering, or was it just part of a rude, elemental life? With the aid of *ABC* (p. 352 *b*) and other commentaries at hand decide the meaning of vv. 18, 20 in ch. 11. How do you explain the expressions "made war a long time" and "it was of the Lord to harden their hearts"? Read aloud from your Bible the summary of this whole enterprise (12:1-24). What are the chief things here recorded about the invasion and conquest of Canaan?

The victories of Joshua over those who opposed him were impressive. The Hebrews regarded these successes as the will of God; it was God's sanction that brought them about. But without Joshua's sheer courage and ability in leadership there would have been no victories.

In the thinking of that day the taking of spoils was commendable. When the soldiers burned the chariots and hamstrung the horses, they were destroying enemy equipment which was of little value to them in the hills. In this they were not so different from us. We assign God's approval to our own preferences at times. But we do have better apprehensions of God and finer insights into life than these early Hebrews had. Revelation is a progressive matter. We increase in knowledge and grow in grace. We of today cannot think of God as fostering cruelties or desiring the extermination of peoples.

Canaan was not seized in a day. There had always been a push

from the desert into the land of milk and honey. Only the powerful groups could realize their dream, and only at such times as the governing power was weak. It took a long time for the Hebrews to get in and gain control of Canaan. They were dealing with a settled people who were headstrong and self-willed.

This story in its summary idealizes the invasion. It presents four chief aspects of the conquest. (1) The invasion and conquest were accomplished by the united efforts of the Hebrews under the leadership of Joshua. In a body they crossed the Jordan from the east to take up their task. (2) The whole enterprise was a speedy matter, carried through quickly in the lifetime of Joshua, with only two or three decisvie battles. (3) The Canaanites were completely annihilated, the work being so thorough that "there was none left that breathed" (11:11). (4) The land was divided into portions and allotted to the various tribes.

Reading 9: Joshua 22:9-34

THE ALTAR ERECTED AT THE JORDAN

The second portion of the book of Joshua (chs. 13-21) deals with the distribution of the various tribes over the land. Crude and primitive religious ideas, which the true Hebrew religion later outgrew, are plentiful in this part. A rapid reading of this section will make clear the progressive nature of revelation. The third portion (chs. 22-24) is concerned with Joshua's final acts and closing speeches.

Why and by whom was the memorial altar at the Jordan erected? Why did one group object to the building of this altar? How can the public of our day be more closely united in its support of the altars of religion? Is there need for our altars of religion to be integrated and more closely unified in worthy efforts? Study the comments in *ABC,* p. 355. Let the setting and the issues involved be real and clear. How did the incident of the memorial altar create a threat of war? How was that war prevented? Has religion ever been the cause of war? How can it function in the prevention of war today?

The people on the east side of the Jordan did something new. They erected an altar at the border of the people west of the river. This violated a tradition; it took away some of the glory of the existing altar at Shiloh. It divided the people. The motives of the newer group were questioned by the members of the

older one. Suppression was demanded. The high promptings of worship were turned into the conflicts of the common matters of daily life. War was in the making. A real threat had come to their common life through this clash in religion.

But the people west of the river formed a commission to investigate the matter (vv. 13-14). A priest of religion was made chairman of this commission on war. He and the ten chieftains with him sought a better understanding of the opposing group and their plans. After a frank and thorough investigation they made their report (v. 32). They found that what had seemed to their people a rebellion against God was intended as a witness to him. Both the commission and the people were "satisfied," and nothing more was said about war. When the life of all has been imperiled by the sin of some, it is well to take time to investigate and understand and to remind ourselves of the loftiest ideas and noblest ways which the insights of religion have made clear. Commissions, investigations, understandings, planning, and counsel have prevented many wars. Warmed with truth, righteousness, courage, and love, people can find a method of banishing the concept of war itself. A just and durable peace is a process. It belongs to all peoples, and so does the task of bringing it about.

Reading 10: Joshua 23:1–24:28

JOSHUA'S FAREWELL ADDRESSES

Put the substance of Joshua's first address (23:1-16) in a few brief sentences in your notebook. What, according to this speech, was God's part in the conquest of Canaan? Joshua's last speech (24:1-28) recounts the mercies and blessings of God. What obligation did these place upon the people? Is God a real factor in the course of history, or is it under the control of other forces? Is there a moral order in the universe which makes for the good in life?

The first speech holds up the conquest as God's achievement (23:9). Joshua is thought of as urging his people to keep the Law, remain strictly loyal to Jehovah, and refrain from all contact with other groups. For him adherence to Law and isolation became the basis of God's promises of good, and violation of the same brought down his threats of evil.

We have always thought of Joshua as a hero and a saint. But

what shall we say of the morals of a conquest like this? Here one people invades the country of another, kills or drives out the owners, and takes possession for itself. We condemn this strongly today. Shall we say that this was the divine plan? Many prefer to think it came from the imperfect beliefs of an earlier day. "God is not, and never was, what Joshua thought him to be. He never led an armed force into Canaan. . . . He did not command the slaughter of Jericho." (Fleming James, *Personalities of the O. T.*) Nor did he put his blessing upon destruction.

By this view Joshua is not removed from the realm of the worthy. It still leaves him a fixed place in religion, not as a hero-saint, but as a real leader and a genuine link in the chain of progress. He carried on the best traditions of his day. He kept alive the best religion he knew. The full story of his life has not reached us; there must have been peaceable elements and noble deeds in that unknown area of his life.

The closing speech of Joshua (24:1-28) is a rapid summary of the history of his people from "days of old" to the death of Joshua. It sums up in the large the experiences of this people as told in our O.T. from Gen. 11:27 to Josh 24:30. The people recognized and readily expressed their obligations to God as they became fully aware of his mercies and blessings, his guidance in life. Joshua's "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (v. 15) and the people's "we also will serve the Lord" (v. 18) were great affirmations. They were rooted in the belief that "he is our God" (v. 18) who has "brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, . . . and preserved us in all the way wherein we went" (v. 17). These leaders and Joshua erected an altar and worshiped God. (v. 26), but this was after they had taken time to sense his goodness in life. Their new pledges of devotion were not unrelated to their history. Their whole past made clear to them the aid and guidance of God. Those who are deeply concerned with the worthy and the good in life can see in the universe a moral order which helps to fashion events across the years.

Written Work.—With Josh. 24:15 as a text write out in full a practical sermon for your people on "The Character and Work of Joshua." In your preparation study closely the sections entitled "The Hero Joshua" and "Historical and Religious Value," *ABC,* pp. 345*b*-46.

II

JUDGES

THE book of Judges is full of stories—stories of heroes and their deeds, stories of important happenings back in the beginnings of Israel's life in her new home in Canaan. The long interval between the invasion of Canaan and the establishment of the Hebrew monarchy was dark with many tribal conflicts. Successive pressing situations, disturbing threats and dangers, showed up at centers all over the land. Israel was not yet really a nation, just a number of tribes fighting for their place in this new land. The land was not all conquered at once; it took years for this. Daring leaders were at hand to deal with the issues of the hour. They were the "judges," the "deciders," of what should be done in the perilous situations. To them the communities looked for deliverance; they became real "saviors" of the people, saving them from capture and death.

Memories of the exploits of these leaders lingered among the people, just as stories of the early days of the American colonists have lingered among us. Some of these stories were patriotic; some had to do with religion and worship. Doubtless many of these deeds of heroism were told freely back in the twelfth century B.C. The stories passed on by word of mouth from father to son through many generations. By the seventh century they had been gathered into a book of adventure—not a book in the common sense, but a collection of incidents and exploits. During the Exile this scroll was read by people under the influence of the religious ideas of this later time. For these readers the stories held a moral meaning: they illustrated the way God worked in the world and shaped the affairs of life. God worked through leaders and their people. When these were loyal to him he prospered them, but as they forsook him he visited them with disaster which lasted until he raised up a new leader. The chief episodes were collected and given a set-

ting that brought out this interpretation of life, which we have come to think of as a philosophy of history. Thus the book of Judges assumed in the main its present form, with the leaders, or judges, whose deeds were related therein supplying its name. About the fifth century B.C. some writer completed this central section of the book of Judges by supplying an introduction and an appendix. The opening section (1:1–2:5) contains a brief early account of the conquest; the main body of the book (2:6—16:31) pictures in succession the activities of thirteen judges, seven of whom were rather minor; and the appendix (chs. 17-21) contains stories of the migration of the Danites (chs. 17-18) and the war against the Benjaminites (chs. 19-21).

Reading 11: Judges 2:6-23

AN INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

Observe the changing life of Israel throughout her past. How had her relation to God varied? How had the conditions of her life been modified? What was the cause of her devious course in history? What framework does this passage furnish for the picture of the judges which follows in the body of the book? What formula or teaching did the author fit into this frame? Consider well the assertion that the greatest danger of this period "was the loss of their distinctive religion." How can one who is aware of the course and cruelties of history believe in divine control? Does history repeat itself, or can it be changed? Is genuine repentance a factor in progress? Neither God nor the community leaders nor the people themselves should be left out of account in this consideration of the destiny of the group.

The Hebrew conquest of Canaan was a hard task, and its ups and downs left their impress on the people. Later leaders felt impelled to explain why the job was a partial failure, why the Canaanites were not completely destroyed. This question was not always answered in the same way. Some believed that the Hebrews faced a superior foe (1:1f.). Others ascribed the failure to the Lord, who wanted to prove Israel (2:22) or to use Canaanites to rouse Israel to warfare. When read as a unit these verses deal with the generation that followed Joshua. The past generation had been loyal in service to God; the later generation "knew not the Lord" nor "the work which he had wrought." This gave the writer his clue to history. Israel's past

was regarded as a process. The people were thought of as one, acting together and ruled over as a whole by each of the judges in succession. Periods of devotion were followed by periods of disloyalty. Both the "full years" and the "lean years" were a part of their ongoing life. Devotion, disloyalty, discipline, and deliverance entered into their theory of history; and both God and man were factors. When the people were good, prosperity prevailed; when they were bad, suffering and disaster were sure.

This interpretation of history is inadequate. It oversimplifies life. The chief meanings of life are not always found in its happy and peaceful situations. Prosperity in the affairs of life is not just a result of being good. This is only a partial view of life. At times the conquering nations are not the upright, nor are the victims being punished for their evil ways. The honest in business may fail and the tricksters prosper. Righteousness may go unrewarded and evil sit on the throne for a season.

But we should not do this author and his view of history an injustice. It is true that there was an artificial element about his framework, and his formula of life was too simple. He was not a historian in the modern sense. But there was a "living truth" in what he said. He saw God behind the whole process of human life. The love of righteousness which filled his soul was worthy. Morality and religion do have a share in shaping events. Real prosperity, not always material, does come to those who live rightly in the sight of God. A higher sense of spiritual contentment is a part of their life. There is a corrective aspect, a disciplinary side, which enters in with evil conduct. Sooner or later wrong living brings ruin, futility of effort, and degradation of life. History has a way of correcting, as well as repeating, itself.

Reading 12: Judges 4–5

THE VICTORY OF DEBORAH AND BARAK

Observe that these chapters describe, in both prose and poetry, the desperate attempt of the Canaanites to crush the Hebrews. Read ch. 4 for its main contents: the crisis, the battle of Mount Tabor, the fate of Sisera, and the aftermath. With the aid of *ABC,* pp. 362-63, give close attention to ch. 5. What chief points does this poetic account supply? What three women are mentioned in this song? Why were the Hebrews victorious in the battle at Mount Tabor? How did Deborah function in its

outcome? How did religion contribute to this defeat of the enemy? What was the decisive factor in the defeat? Did all the tribes join in this battle? What was the ultimate outcome of the conflict—victory, defeat, or peace? What worthy qualities received commendation?

The prose and poetic accounts of the victory over Sisera supplement each other at numerous points. The song of Deborah (ch. 5) is one of the oldest and best examples of Hebrew poetry. "In vigor and vividness it is unsurpassed." (C. F. Kent, *Founders and Rulers of United Israel.*) Deborah, Barak, or some other gifted contemporary sang of the victory, and the reflections of the song on matters of that day are reliable. It is our most dependable source for that early period in Israel's life.

The Hebrews had increased rapidly in numbers and strength following their invasion of Canaan. The inhabitants of that land viewed with fear the growing strength of the invaders, but they managed to keep under their own control certain strategic points. They had a zone of fortified cities stretching across the Esdraelon Plain. Clearly a crisis was approaching. To the Canaanites the rising threat of the Hebrews was real, and Sisera and his army determined to stop this menace. As for the Hebrews, their civilization and religion were in danger. They faced subjection, if not banishment from the land. The resistance of the Canaanites had already rendered many roads unsafe, and caravans had been reduced to a trickle. But lethargy, isolation, and delay were still in evidence among the Hebrews. They were weak, not from lack of courage or skill in warfare, but from want of effective leadership. They had no able leader to oppose Sisera or to unite the tribes by the bond of a common cause.

But the need of the hour supplied its own leader. "Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, she judged Israel at that time." (4:4.) She was a remarkable woman, the embodiment of both patriotism and religion. In qualities of leadership, vigor, and judgment she was worthy of high recognition. She saw that it was "time to act, she chose the right leader for the action, and stimulated the faith to the winning point. She created the morale needed for the situation." (J. M. P. Smith, *The Prophets and Their Times.*) That Barak requested her actual presence on the field of battle was a recognition of her distinguished service. She was indeed a "mother" in Israel, and not

lacking in the counsel of her God. She had no easy task. In the name of her God she found the tie that binds, broke down the barriers of isolation, and moved her people to heroic deeds. Although some of the tribes are not even mentioned and others refused to do battle, she formed a confederacy sufficiently large to oppose the common peril.

The battle which Sisera projected from Mount Tabor was brief and glorious for the Hebrews. Able leaders, strategy, advantage of position, weather conditions, and the morale of the soldiers brought victory and its far-reaching consequences.

This battle had deep meaning in the life of Israel. It meant not just a sweeping victory for them and a severe defeat for their enemies. Here was a movement for freedom, a blow struck for independence. The power of the oppressor was broken. We hear no more of his molestations. A process was under way out of which the two enemies would emerge not as confirmed foes but as a single people with a common cause.

We are not to "forget that much of Deborah's activity followed the paths of peace." The song of victory sounds the praise of loyal men who risked their lives and property in a joint effort for the freedom of all. It condemns as cowards those who would reap the fruits of victory without sharing in its labors, and chides them for their indifference and failure to cooperate. The same song that "extols the treacherous act of Jael and gloats over the fallen enemy also rings the praise of the volunteers and pours contempt on the stay-at-homes" (James, *op. cit.*). The song has its primitive concepts of God and human behavior, but it is not lacking in those finer insights of life which the years have made glorious. Deborah's burning enthusiasm for the Lord, her sense of responsibility for the welfare of her people, her willingness to carry in her heart the burdens of the distressed, her readiness to risk her life for the ideals which she counted dear, the worthy faith which lived in her soul—these qualities shine from that dark period with the brightness of "the sun when he goes forth with his might."

Reading 13: Judges 6:1–8:29

GIDEON'S VICTORY OVER THE MIDIANITES

Read this whole passage aloud for its impression of Gideon. Was he a religious reformer or a military leader? What chal-

lenging feature do you find in his life? Note the outrages of Midian (6:1-10), Gideon's decision to deliver his people (6:11-24), the altars of Jehovah and Baal at Ophrah (6:25-32), the defeat and victory at the battle of Jezreel (6:33–7:25), the pursuit of the enemy to the desert (8:1-21), and the erection of the sacred image made of the captured spoils (8:22-28). Study the comments in *ABC* (pp. 363*b*-65) on each of these parts.

What factors made for the defeat and rout of the Midianites? Consider the leader's ability and sense of mission; his assurance of God's support; his use of choice and dependable soldiers, a definite and comprehensive plan, quick and co-ordinated effort, disturbing strategy, skillful spies; and his vigorous handling of the foe. Note also the weariness of the enemy, his fear and dread of revenge, and his lack of adequate weapons and supplies. With the aid of *ABC* and any other available helps make a special study of the following passages: 6:12, 14, 16; 6:30-31; 6:39; 7:7, 9; 8:20-21. What light do these throw on Gideon and his family?

The Hebrews were always liable to forays from the desert. At times they would repel these attacks with the sword, but often they would just submit to robbery or pay tribute for protection. For years the Midianites had made their inroads into the settled lands. At harvest time they would ride in on their swift camels, forage the crops, and make back to the desert with their spoils. As the bountiful crops were ripening, a new band of these marauders came into the rich valley of Jezreel for their systematic robbery. The hungry horde spread over the region, as they had done year after year, expecting no resistance from the farmers. But this time it was different. The brigands had killed some of the brothers of Gideon, one of the powerful and spirited farmers of the community. The law of blood revenge impelled him to action. As the brother of the slain men, this farmer recognized the obligations resting on him and took advantage of the opportunity to save and protect his people.

Gideon was a resourceful, independent, sturdy man, ready to defend his home from all hazards. But he did not act simply on his own account; he felt that he was under the orders of his God. He was convinced that God was present in his life with purpose. A great work was waiting to be done, and this was the challenge of his patriotism and religious zeal. As he went about

his day's work, beating out the grain in a winepress concealed from the bandits, he sensed the "immediate presence of God" and became aware of his own powers. "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor" (6:12*b*) was the word which gave him courage to take up the task before him.

Gideon was an able military leader. He wanted to know at first hand the status and morale of the opposing camp; he would not rely on numbers alone. His resourceful strategy challenged the spirit of his men. He was able to handle the dissatisfactions and differences that arose within the camp of his own group. His modesty, good temper, and flattery were not lacking at the time of need. For a better understanding of him study Fleming James's *Personalities of the O. T.,* pp. 64-74.

Gideon had his faults. He lived in the light of his own day. His cruelties to the men of Succoth and Penuel shock us, but these were rooted in his outraged sense of national obligation. He sought and obtained blood revenge, but for his day this was society's recognized way of maintaining peace. The large harem which he left at his death in ripe old age is offensive to us, but for his day this was not so much a mark of lust as a sign of ambition. "Yet over against these blemishes must be set his devotion to Yahweh, his public spirit, his modesty, his brilliance in strategy, his daring, his good temper and magnanimity" (F. James).

Reading 14: Judges 10:6–12:7

JEPHTHAH'S VICTORY OVER THE AMMONITES

What theory of national disaster does this passage hold? This extended statement or formula explains again the view of history around which the book of Judges is organized. We note here a people searching for a leader, not a leader seeking to arouse the people. Observe how 11:1-11 reflects the hostile conditions among the tribes themselves. What was the agreement between the Gileadites and Jephthah? Was Jephthah fair in his demands? What question was under consideration and what conclusion was reached in Jephthah's diplomatic correspondence with the king of Ammon (11:12-28)? Read 11:29-33 for the meaning of Jephthah's vow and victory. How long had this war lasted? How many cities were conquered under the push of Jephthah? Do you consider his vow worthy

or foolhardy? As you read 11:34-40, decide its point of chief interest. Which is more significant, the noble resignation of this girl or the father's crushing grief and loyalty to his word?

As nomads the early Hebrews avoided conflicts with the Ammonites by pushing in between them and the eastern banks of the Jordan. In these new quarters the tribes had their pressing problems. Conditions were disorganized and hostility was frequent among the groups. Jephthah was thrust out of Gilead by his own group as a half-breed. As a border ruffian he organized a band of outlaws whose exploits were the talk of the day. In the meantime Ammon began to make unreasonable demands on Gilead. These Ammonites insisted that this region be returned to them since it had once been under their control. This claim they backed up with raids and acts of cruelty on the Hebrew farmers. As affairs reached the breaking point the elders of Gilead recalled Jephthah and appointed him as their new leader. He accepted on the condition that he become their chieftain, or "judge," in case of victory over the Ammonites. The Gileadites regarded this a reasonable basis for his advancement. They granted that the worthy accomplishment of the work in hand merited recognition.

Jephthah's new role was typical of the "judge" of his day, and he well illustrates the nature of that position. We are not to think of these "judges" in Israel as similar to our judges today. These persons were not elected to their positions. Their duties were not defined by constitution. No generally recognized code of laws existed then. There was no such thing as a policy of national defense. When the country was invaded there was no check until some energetic person through his own initiative or that of his friends organized a group and expelled the enemy. In this way one became powerful, the principal citizen of his district. He became a "deliverer," a "savior," a "champion," a "community leader"; thenceforth men brought him their disputes for settlement and their community problems for consideration.

Jephthah's vow itself would not rank high in our day. It belongs to a religion that looked upon human sacrifice as man's dearest offering to God, and thought of offerings as God's chief concern. The more costly the gift, the more likely God was to grant the desires of the one making the offering. Such views

of God and man are unworthy of our religion today. But Jephthah's unyielding devotion to the highest he knew in God, his effort to bring the whole round of his daily life under subjection to the will of God, and his readiness to subordinate his dearest delights to the common needs of his people still challenge us today. Nor is the daughter's "Do with me as you declared" lacking in its lift to our spirits. This girl's noble resignation to the God of her people and submergence of her plans in order to serve her generation will not be forgotten.

Reading 15: Judges 13–16

SAMSON AND THE PHILISTINES

Read the stories (14:1–15:6) centering around Samson's marriage at Timnath for their picture of the border conditions as the Philistines were coming into power. Do we find here actual incidents taken from the life of a leader or stories that have "gravitated to a popular hero"? How does Samson differ from the other leaders in the book of Judges? Read aloud, for their picture of the common people, the stories which have to do with the reprisals by the Philistines (15:7-20). Why did the Judeans wish to deliver Samson to them?

Read the story of the affair at Gaza (16:1-3) and the incidents connected with Samson's marriage to Delilah of Sorek (16:4-31). Note the hero's freakish acts and display of strength and wit. What is the teaching of this story, if any, on laxity in sexual relations and toying with temptation?

Read the story of Samson's birth (13:3-25) in the light of his career as a whole. What is the religious value of this material? Is its purpose to teach religious lessons? The greatest interpretation of this passage is Rembrandt's painting in the Dresden Art Gallery, "The Offering of Manoah."

Early in the twelfth century B.C. the Philistines, pushed from their quarters over the sea, appeared on the coast of Syria. Unsuccessful in their attempts to invade Egypt, they gained a foothold along the western coast of Palestine. As they increased in numbers and strength they began to push into the hill country of the Hebrews. This created friction between the two groups. The little tribe of Dan, then living in this dangerous borderland, felt the pressure first. Some of the episodes of these conflicts have been preserved in the stories of Samson.

This cycle of stories is a collection of "weird hero-tales, loosely strung together," having to do largely with the freakish acts of Samson in his dealings with the Philistines. As such they are a mixture of history and tradition. At first they were "independent stories of a purely secular character, centering . . . around one or more village heroes; they were then gradually formed into a cycle, and finally they all became attached to one central figure" (*ABC*, p. 368*b*).

The human interest features of these stories still make their popular appeal. We read with zest of Samson's desire to marry the girl from Timnath, the protest of his parents, the presence of the thirty Philistine attendants, the wager and the riddle with its answer, the securing and the paying of the wager fee, the delay of the wedding, the girl's marriage to another, the return visit of Samson, and his scheme of vengeance on the Philistine farmers by the use of firebrands and foxes.

Likewise the reprisal efforts of the Philistines against the girl and the property of her parents; their bribery of Judean bands for the capture of Samson; and his response of slaughter, playful jokes, and newly devised weapons of destruction—these interesting details call forth the full play of our imagination.

The hero's remaining adventures at Gaza and in Sorek are not lacking in their power to amuse. His feat of strength by which he carried off the gates of Gaza to Hebron forty miles away; his winning of his new wife, Delilah; her deceitful trickery of him, accepting bribes from the Philistine chiefs; his loss of his locks and his strength in a nap which marked the end of his joyful jibes at those who had played him false; his capture and severe treatment by his foe, followed by the renewed strength whereby the superman pushed apart the pillars of the temple and brought down the house upon himself and his captors—all these bear marks of folly and futility, but they are good stories.

These stories of Samson are not rich in religious content. It was not their religious value that preserved them. Samson has sometimes been held up as a worthy character, presented as an example of wholesome courage and virtue, and regarded as a gift of God, born to do special work. His acts, it is claimed, were governed by an overruling providence, his person kept clean from the defilement of foods, and his death made glorious with the heroism and patriotism of his life. But such a presentation is

"dangerous." Samson was lacking in the basic principles of morality. Governed by his passions and selfish interests, he was unmindful of the rights and property of others and free in his use of revenge and deceit. "Aside from the devout story of his birth, there is little of religious values in the Samson cycle, unless it be used as a warning against futile living." (Knopf, *The O.T. Speaks.*) For an extended presentation of this aspect, see Knopf's *Bible Youth in Modern Times* (ch. 3). "Samson is a signal example of a man who possessed great gifts, but who failed to consecrate them to a noble cause." (Kent, *op. cit.*)

Reading 16: Judges 17–18

THE DANITES AND THEIR CHIEF SANCTUARY AT DAN

Read the entire appendix (chs. 17-21) of the book of Judges at one sitting for its portrayal of the political, social, and moral conditions of that early period. Read chs. 17-18 for their basic contents. Observe the origin, equipment, and use of Micah's sanctuary; the removal of the tribe of Dan to its new home; the work of the spies and their clansmen; and their experiences at Micah's shrine and at the new sanctuary at Dan. Read ch. 18 for its historical content. What is the significance of this passage for history? What was the status of religion in that period?

The tribe of Dan was settled in the south of the land before quarters were established in the north. The Samson stories (Judg. 13:1) and portions of Joshua (19:40-41) make it clear that the Danites in their earlier days lived near the Philistines. As conflicts arose and their abode became smaller, these Danites pushed forth ruthlessly to advance their own interests. They selected an area near the source of the Jordan. The place was inviting, and the people were peaceful and busy with their trade and commerce, with no ready support from allies. The Danites, with consideration only for themselves, conquered the people, burned their city, built on its ruins their own city, and set up therein their chief sanctuary.

There was much in the conduct of this tribe, as of the others, which we cannot sanction. But in that time living conditions and ideals were far removed from those of our day. It was an age with little restraint and with but a crude moral consciousness. Life and ideals were on a low level. Religion, too, was primitive. That is seen by the pictures given here of the sanctuaries and

their equipment and use. Micah, for example, had his own shrine with its house of gods. He wanted to get out of his gods all he could. To this end he set up their images, selected his own priesthood, and gave due attention to the invoked curse, which was thought sure of fulfillment unless heeded. People were eager for their own advantage and lacking in consideration for others. The Danites on the way to their new home seized Micah's sanctuary and carried off its equipment, gods, and priest for use in a land which they planned to seize by force—and this in the name of religion. That a stolen sanctuary, operated by people devoid of justice and consideration for others, could function for right is contrary to our beliefs. But we do observe that their life was in the process of growth, that their religion meant loyalty to God as they understood it, and that this loyalty was regularly expressed in worship. The moral element in that worship was sadly defective, but loyalty to God faithfully expressed was preparation for a higher religion—the religion of justice, mercy, and love which the later prophets were to see and proclaim.

Reading 17: Judges 19-21

THE OUTRAGE AT GIBEAH AND THE WAR WITH BENJAMIN

Read chs. 19-21 (with the aid of *ABC,* p. 374) for their chief contents. Observe the Levite in Gibeah, the war with Benjamin, the defeat of Jabesh-gilead, and the festival at Shiloh. Study carefully the outrage at Gibeah (19:22-28). Observe the position of woman in society, the protective attitude toward strangers in a community, and the heartless adherence of people to their convictions. Can God use imperfect people to accomplish his will? Has the freedom of woman promoted a higher and happier civilization? Note the finer aspects of Hebrew life in the rude days of the judges (19:11-21; 20:3-13; 21:1, 5, 18).

The crime at Gibeah was brutal and revolting in the extreme. The incident reflects a total lack of regard for woman; the men, guest and host, were endangered, and they sacrificed their womenfolk for their own protection (19:24).

These tribes lacked unity. There was no centralization of worship. It took the pieces of human flesh to rouse the tribes to a common action. Moral standards were lacking. There was no conscience in the matter of securing wives for the survivors of

Benjamin. The tribes thought only of themselves and of the plight of Benjamin.

The story of the old man coming from the field at evening (19:14-21) is full of charm. It reflects a wholehearted, generous, unselfish, charming hospitality. It is bright with promise in that dark period. "All your needs shall be solely my care" (19:20*a* —*American Trans.*) holds the germ of the higher aspects of religion.

The dawning of the finer life in that crude period was evident also in the presence of a sense of responsibility for social wrongs. A community, such as the Benjaminites at Gibeah, was held responsible for acts that took place in its midst. The length to which the people were willing to go to secure what they thought was right deserves our understanding and consideration. Right for them was priceless, dearer than life itself. The years were to bring new insight into the contents of the right, to elevate its ideals and standards and find new areas for their application; but without this sense of the right and the hearty response to its demands there would not have been the later realization in its finer stages.

Written Work.—Review *Reading* 14 and make a special study of Jephthah's vow and its fulfillment. Note how the ideas of that day about God and his requirements of his people differ from those of the Christian teaching. Compare Jephthah's cry, "You have stricken me low" (11:35*b*) with the daughter's plea, "Do to me as you declared" (v. 36—*American Trans.*). Consider the best way to face the difficult situations in life. Is one to close his eyes on his hardships and hazards, bemoan their presence with self-pity, or accept and courageously use them for noble ends?

Use the results of this study in a talk to your young people. Write out in full what you would say to them on these two points: (1) Tell the story in your own words, as interestingly as you can, making the whole incident lifelike and simple. (2) Point out what there was in the spirit and attitude of Jephthah and his daughter which we should seek for our own lives, showing how this could be applied today.

III

RUTH

THE book of Ruth receives its name from the chief character, or heroine, of its story, Ruth the Moabitess. It is a simple and beautiful tale which relates the misfortunes of a Jewish family abroad in Moab (1:1-22) and the fortunate course of a Moabite girl in Judah (2:1–4:22). The Jewish family all but perished, while the foreign girl was privileged to establish a long and worthy line of descendants.

As literature the book is a "wonderful prose poem, sweet, artless, and persuasive, . . . fresh with the scent of the harvest fields" (McFadyen). Its purpose was didactic. Either through history or by fiction the author was holding up a vital truth to his people. He wanted them to realize that there was a love "broader than the measure of man's mind" which was essential in their living.

The story is placed in the days when the judges ruled (1:1), back in the eleventh century B.C. However, the conditions which it combated were much later. At the time of Ezra and Nehemiah worldliness and laxity were the order of the day. Under the resurgence of nationalism these leaders saw a connection between this corrupt conduct and the way in which their people mixed with the outside world. They believed the nation's sad plight was due largely to intermarriage with foreigners. Ezra demanded that Jews who had so intermarried should put away their foreign wives and disavow their children. This demand created much distress and bitterness in the community (Ezra 10:1-4). The book of Ruth is a protest against such narrowness. It sought to counteract such a harmful policy with a broader good will. Ruth, the mountain girl from Moab, stood as a shining example of the ability and worth of the "foreigners," and the fact that her son, Obed, became the grandfather of David was an abiding witness against intolerance and exclusiveness.

Reading 18: Ruth 1

A JEWISH FAMILY IN MOAB

Read this entire chapter for its picture of the family as a whole. Note the experiences of the family, the crop failure, the arrival in Moab, the death of the father, the marriage of the two sons to Moabite women, and the later death of these two sons. Are these experiences idealized, or simple and true to life? Is Naomi presented sympathetically or with a certain irony (vv. 6-15, 20-21)? Note her desire to return to Judah, her advice to her daughters-in-law, her thought of them as belonging to Moab and foreign to Judah, and her own self-pity and disregard of Ruth's devotion. Do these show marks of narrowness or racial feeling? Observe and account for the daughters' kindness (v. 8) and the mother's fortitude in facing the uncertain future alone (v. 15). Do these noble qualities suggest any message for the grieved of our time? Study vv. 16-17 for their beauty of expression and depth of insight. Contrast Orpah's utilitarian consideration with Ruth's sacrifical love. How can national and religious barriers be overcome?

Naomi after years away from home returned to her native land. Life in Moab had been harsh with her. The death of her children followed that of her husband, and the insecurity of life had been her constant companion. But news came that God had smiled on Judah and that her people had food. However, at her return things were not altogether bright and lovely. Life there too had its deplorable aspects, its disillusionment. The whole situation had changed. She had gone away full and come back empty. She felt that the Lord had dealt bitterly with her.

The author of the book was sympathetic with this phase of Naomi's life. He valued her loyalty to her country, undimmed by the years of absence. He recognized her great sorrow and appreciated the high courage with which, defenseless and alone, she faced the uncertain future.

But for certain aspects of Naomi's life the author had no praise. She had her limitations, and these did not escape his shrewd insight. She was given to brooding over the harshness of the past. She was looking at her scars and pitying herself. She was all but rebellious against the Lord. She was self-seeking and inconsiderate of those who had served her. With implied

criticism the author exposed her weakness. But these limitations were incidental, not fundamental. They could be changed.

In this portion of the story Ruth hardly more than begins her role, yet it is clear that the author holds her in high favor. Her decision was bold and sacrificial. It was not easy for her to turn her back on her kindred, her country, and her God. There was great risk in committing herself to a new God and taking on the life of a new people in a strange land. But, with a purpose that could not be altered, Ruth left Orpah and went with Naomi to Bethlehem. This noble start of the foreigner on her worthy career received the author's full approval in the superb words of her plea—words which so many have carried in their hearts.

The portraits of both Ruth and Naomi are incomplete in this passage, but their main features can be discerned. The two women, with Boaz, represent "three clearly defined groups in the population of Palestine in those days": (1) the returned exiles and their descendants; (2) the foreign elements; and (3) the native Jews, who had not come under the influences felt by the first groups (*ABC,* pp. 379*b*-80).

Reading 19: Ruth 2–4

THE MARRIAGE OF RUTH AND BOAZ

After you have read this passage as a whole, center your study on ch. 2, with the aid of *ABC,* pp. 377-78. How does Naomi's attitude toward Ruth differ from that of Boaz? What aspects of Ruth's character are emphasized here? Note Naomi's strategy for bringing Boaz to a decision. Wherein was Boaz a hero (vv. 6-15)? What enabled him to stand the strain to which he was subjected? Read ch. 4 for the marriage of Ruth and Boaz and for Naomi's new role. Was this marriage under public approval? Did this foreign bride become one with her adopted people? Did the mixed marriage hold any benefits for the nation?

Read the entire book of Ruth now at one sitting. What groups in the life of the people are represented by the main characters? What was the author's main aim in the book? Of what value is that message to us? Consult *ABC,* pp. 379*b*-80.

Naomi was unaware of Ruth's full meaning to her. Ruth took upon herself the rigor of toil and danger to save Naomi from charity or excessive labor; but the measure of this devotion was missed by Naomi. She called down Jehovah's blessing

on Boaz for allowing Ruth to glean and expressed her gratitude to God for him, for he was her hope. Her kin had been her benefactor. But she failed to bless the gleaner, not from harshness so much as from narrow nationalism. This lack is more evident in her stratagem for Ruth with Boaz. She tried to take care of Ruth, but in reality Ruth was caring for her. The plan even imperiled Ruth's honor. Naomi had good intentions, but she was blinded by her narrow prejudice. She failed to sense the love and sacrifice of the one who was closest to her in life.

But the story ends with Naomi in a new role. With a baby pressed to her bosom she began to realize that she was not in the presence of a foreigner but beside her daughter-in-law, who was, as her neighbors had said, one "who loveth thee, . . . who is better to thee than seven sons" (4:15*b*).

Boaz was more considerate of Ruth than was Naomi. He was gracious to her from the start, so much so that Ruth was impressed. Her task became less difficult. His fine courtesy refused to consider her a foreigner. In all his relations Boaz was trustworthy. His motives were pure and his morals unstained. Naomi had her influence on Boaz, but through Ruth. Without her all the strategy would have been in vain.

The role of Ruth was not an easy one. She was separated from her own people and faced the humiliation of a strange land. Her hard labor was a mark of strength. Her survival proved her a useful citizen, worthy of all acceptation.

Not only did the three leading characters of the book—Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz,—symbolize three groups within the community in their relation to a pressing social controversy then current. The author was suggesting his solution of that issue. The exilic group could not disregard the non-Jewish portion. All elements in the population must form one whole. Returned exiles, native Jews, and foreigners must dwell together in harmony.

The problem of the treatment of the foreigner stretches across the years. We still face the question of intermarriage among groups as well as the whole problem of exclusiveness, and the author's solution offers valuable aid to us today. Sacrificial good will and intelligent co-operation make for the good of all. "To give what we can in gracious co-operation with those who can give what we cannot" (*ABC*, p. 380*b*) is the principle laid down in the book of Ruth.

IV

FIRST AND SECOND SAMUEL

The books of Samuel are a part of a larger body of literature which dealt with Israel's past from the days of Samuel the king-maker to the collapse of the nation under Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. Our twin books of Samuel, like the two books of Kings, were a single volume in Hebrew. When the O. T. was translated into Greek the longer writing was divided into two sections, or books, for convenience. These translators regarded the material in Samuel and Kings as a unit covering the complete history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Hence they designated this body of literature, which in the Greek required four scrolls, as the First, Second, Third, and Fourth "Books of the Kingdoms." The same divisions were maintained by Jerome in the Latin version, but he changed the title to "Books of Kings." As this body of writing passed into our Christian Bibles, and from them back into the printed editions of the Hebrew text, the four divisions were retained, but each pair of books bore the early Hebrew title. Hence we have First and Second Samuel, as well as First and Second Kings.

The books of Samuel do not bear the name of their author—that remains unknown to this day—but the name of the great leader whose story is told at the beginning of the books and whose life influenced the entire period covered by them.

These books of Samuel took their first form under the bitter experiences of the Hebrew exile, which began with the deportation in 597 B.C. Thoughtful Jews turned from their tears to view the long history of their past. They found great satisfaction in the glories of those centuries now coming to an end in bitterness. Some able and sensitive Jewish writer of that time, quickened under the influence of Deuteronomy, was moved to produce an account of the experiences of his people from the last of the judges to the last of the kings, lifting into prominence

the golden age of David. It was a long story of some five hundred years, reaching from about 1100 B.C. to the author's time.

The author had various sources at hand. Some of these records were very old. They dealt with far-off times, but they had their rise in the wake of the events themselves, some of them going back to the tenth century B.C. There were stories about Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon. There were records of the kings of Israel, records of the kings of Judah, priestly annals of the temple, and prophetic incidents and stories. Not all this material viewed matters alike. Diverse attitudes were expressed and opposite views taken on such matters, for instance, as the founding of the monarchy. That rich body of firsthand material has perished, and we have only what the writer preserved in the books which took shape under his hands.

Some fifty years later, from deep within the captivity after the nation's collapse, a Jewish exile in Babylon completed the story in Samuel and Kings by bringing it down to the thirty-seventh year of the king's captivity—about 560 B.C. The influence of Deuteronomy, with its noble ideals of religion, induced this writer to revise the whole story in the light of that prophetic religious point of view. The books of Samuel and Kings are rich in historical and religious values. The stories of Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, Elijah and Elisha, and the lesser people of that period, and the recounting of the fortunes of Israel amid the great powers of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon make this body of literature one of the great works of all time.

The material covered in the books of Samuel extends from the circumstances surrounding the birth of Samuel to the close of David's public life, with the death of Saul marking the division between the two books. The contents of these two books cluster around (1) Samuel and the monarchy—I Sam. 1–14; (2) Saul and David—1 Sam. 15–31; (3) the reign and history of David—2 Sam. 1–20; with (4) an appendix of miscellaneous matters—2 Sam. 21–24.

Reading 20: 1 Samuel 1:1–2:11

HANNAH AND HER CONSECRATION OF SAMUEL

Read 1:1-28 with your attention fixed on Hannah. Why did the Hebrews look down on the childless woman? Consider the influence on the families of the yearly sacrifice at Shiloh. Was

sacrifice regarded as a rite or a gift? Why was any gift considered sacramental? Read 2:1-10 and the comments of *ABC* (p. 384) on this passage. What were the marks of piety in the early Israel? Is this song suitable for general thanksgiving?

This passage presents a notable picture of a humble home and a simple sanctuary. It is not so much a picture of Samuel as of his mother. The home was marred by jealousy and sorrow. Hannah was childless, and the Hebrews always regarded this condition a great disaster because it brought a break in the family which touched all members, living and dead. The other wife, Peninnah, was jealous of Elkanah's great love for Hannah. The taunts of this jealousy enhanced Hannah's sorrow. She was constantly reminded of her lack of children. The father took the family once a year to the sanctuary at Shiloh to worship and make merry in the sacrificial feast.

One year the grief of Hannah was too deep for words. Even the tender solicitude of her husband failed to comfort her. In her desperation she turned to the sanctuary of God in earnest prayer. An excellent narrative with deep emotional appeal unfolds before us this whole scene and its results. The story portrays Hannah praying for a child and making her vow to God, her reply to Eli who with sharp rebuke misunderstood her tears and moving lips, Eli's quick understanding and blessing, her immediate assurance and recovered joy, the return home and the fulfillment of her desire, her joy in remaining behind from the yearly journey to have her boy to herself, her later return to the temple with him as her gift, her revealing conversation with Eli, her presentation of the child to the Lord in the brave words of her offering, and the child's first worship in the temple.

The song sung by Hannah (2:1-10) over this gift of a son which she had returned to the Lord is a prayer of exultation. Doubtless the song is later in composition, probably written around the fourth century B.C. and put here because it fits the occasion. If this be true, Hannah lived in the memory of the people as one who had made good her promise to the Lord. The similarity of this song to the Magnificat (Lk. 1:46f.), which Luke assigns to Mary the mother of Jesus, is striking. Both women sang of their joy in the Lord, of the exaltation of the lowly and the debasement of the mighty, of the emptiness of the rich, and of the hungry being filled with bread.

Reading 21: I Samuel 2:12–3:21

THE FALL OF ELI'S HOUSE AND THE CALL OF SAMUEL

Read 2:12-36 and note the existing religious conditions. What qualities are desirable in public officials? How does knowing God differ from knowing about God? Why do some deeply religious people do evil? Read ch. 3 with the help of *ABC* (p. 385) and try to understand this experience of Samuel. What influence did Hannah's annual visit to Shiloh have on Samuel? What was the nature of Samuel's work in the sanctuary? Why did he believe that God would intervene in the behalf of right?

Samuel was at the heart of the religious life of the tribes in Shiloh. His mother's influence had served him well in preparation. His developing insights of boyhood enabled him to know what was going on about him. He was aware that all was not well in the temple. The sins of Eli's sons were gross. They used their inherited office in the sanctuary for extortion and immorality. This was nothing less than contempt for God. The laity, with a fine moral sense, poured in their complaints to Eli. They wanted both integrity and chastity in their priests. Eli was lacking in strength as a leader; he remonstrated, but took no positive steps to stop wickedness.

Samuel would close the doors of the sanctuary at evening and open them at morning. He slept in the presence of the ark, where the lamp of God was kept burning. One night as he was lying in the sacred room he sensed a message from God. It was a message of doom to the house of Eli. When pressed by the priest for its meaning, he boldly declared the awful fate in prospect, which the aged priest meekly accepted. Samuel had a personal experience of God. His religion was no longer traditional or secondhand. It is encouraging to find such an experience and such a message at a time when religion was at the lowest ebb. It was striking then; it is impressive now. After this insight "the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh" (3:21*b*). His utterances were distinctive for their reliability, as the Lord "let none of his words fall to the ground" (3:19*b*), and all Israel knew that Samuel was "a prophet of the Lord." He was indeed a "seer," one who had seen things revealed to him by the Lord. People of various needs, some of them quite trivial, came to consult him on the issues which they faced.

Reading 22: 1 Samuel 4:1–7:2

THE DEFEAT OF ISRAEL AND THE FORTUNES OF THE ARK

Read ch. 4 for the story of the defeat of Israel in the two battles with the Philistines. With the aid of *ABC* (pp. 385*b*-86) describe the ark. Explain the Hebrew attitude toward the ark.

Read ch. 5 for its account of the plagues on the Philistines. How account for the disasters to the Philistines after their capture of the ark? Were these due to natural causes, and, if so, would this remove them from the hand of God? Was this only that age's interpretation of its misfortunes?

Read 6:1-7:2 aind decide what happened to the ark, to Shiloh, and to Samuel in this conflict of the two peoples.

The Philistines were a strong and enterprising people living along the Mediterranean shore. The Hebrews were near by in the hills and valleys of central Palestine. With limited territory two such agressive peoples were sure to come into conflict. At first the Philistines were better organized and equipped with superior weapons. They forced a battle at Aphek in which the Hebrews were defeated. In their extreme peril the Hebrews brought down the ark of the Lord from Shiloh for the second battle. In their thinking the ark meant the presence of God. To feel that he was in their midst and that they were fighting for him brought courage, kindled their zeal, and made them sure of victory. Confidently they advanced to the attack. But the very despair of the Philistines lent them courage and strength. They met the onslaught with vigorous effort, and the Hebrews suffered another signal defeat. The ark itself was captured and the two priests who were leading were killed. The report of the sad news from the front brought disaster at home. The death of Eli added to the crisis.

Not only the independence but the faith of the Hebrews was involved in this crisis. To their minds these disasters meant that their God was weaker than the gods of their foe, or else he did not care to deliver them. Soon, however, their faith found its renewal. A severe plague spread over the Philistine plain. The people, ignorant of the real nature of contagious diseases, became an easy prey to the spreading ravages as the ark and those carrying it passed from one city to another. The Philistines interpreted this pestilence as the answer of the God of the

Hebrews to their desecration of his sanctuary. They lost no time in returning the ark to its own land, with all honor.

The real results of the Philistine victory are not clear. Perhaps the narrator was interested in telling how the Lord compelled the Philistines to send the ark back home. It is plain that the Philistines obtained a firmer hold on the country and made their yoke heavier on the Hebrews in central Canaan. Shiloh, the seat of worship, must have been wiped out of existence. At least the ark when regained was not sent back there but was placed in a private home. Too, the priests of Eli's house were no longer at Shiloh but in the village of Nob. A later age held a definite memory of Shiloh's destruction (Jer. 7:12-15), and this is supported by excavations that show the city's destruction about 1050 B.C.

With Shiloh destroyed, what happened to Samuel? Our sources are silent concerning some forty years. The shock of this tragedy must have been severe on him. He had grown up in the temple, sleeping in the room with the ark. All that was dear to him was swept away, and the Lord as symbolized in the ark had lost his power. The people's faith in the ark had been rudely shaken by its capture, and Samuel himself paid no further attention to it so far as we know from the sources.

Reading 23: 1 Samuel 8:1-22; 10:17-27

THE NEED FOR A KING IN ISRAEL

Read 8:1-5 for the people's view of the need for a king. For what reason did they demand a king? Read 8:6-18 for Samuel's attitude toward this demand for a king. What were his reasons for not wanting a king? Observe the social cost of royalty. What service was expected in return from the king? Read 10:17-27 for the method used in selecting a king. What was Saul doing? Was the allegiance to him complete?

The people were not satisfied with existing conditions. Samuel was too old to judge efficiently. His sons were incompetent, grasping, and base in their lives. The Hebrews were unlike other peoples in their form of government. They thought a change would help: "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (8:5*b*). But such a government was expensive in money and men. Previously the devoted leaders had come from the ranks. They fostered in the community the will of God as

disclosed in their own religious beliefs or indicated by the insights of prophetic souls. This allowed progress and united leadership without casting off the values of the past. But a king was different. His rule would bring an end to this homely democracy. The people would be under his control. The home and the common man would become subject to courts and palaces. The only way to preserve the welfare of all was to fuse the demand of the people with the ideal of the prophet. This was accomplished by selecting the king on the basis of the principles of government fostered by the judges. Saul came from the ranks, from an ordinary family interested in the common good. Samuel showed his greatness in standing for a popular king, if kings were to be allowed. He was "a great man; a man with a noble mind and a breaking heart" (Knopf, *The O.T. Speaks*). Only a person of such gifts could fuse this idealism with popular demands.

The method of selection by lot was a common practice in that day. To select the proper person was difficult. "Pray and then toss up" was not a sure principle then, nor is it a safe one for us to follow. Their method seems childish, but their belief that the will of God can be discovered by those who are ready to do that will is challenging. That a person may have God's approval on his life and his sanction on the choices of his way is heartening and worthy of our consideration, for we too are to have with us on our courses those "worthless fellows" (10:27) who foster despair, as well as "men of valor, whose hearts God has touched" (10:26*b*).

Reading 24: 1 Samuel 9:1–10:16

SAUL MADE KING

Read 9:1-14 for the story of the lost asses. Observe Saul's ability and the nature of his life in the home. What was the nature of the work of an early seer? Saul was awakened to his mission in life by Samuel, who felt impelled of God. Was the establishment of the Hebrew kingdom of God's purpose, or did it result from the rebellion of the people? Note the details of the secret anointing of Saul. The modesty of Saul, his presence at the banquet, the night spent with Samuel, and the farewell at the border of the city are all worthy of consideration. What do you suppose Samuel and Saul talked about that

night? Do you know of any instances in which a talk with a great person has influenced a life? Read 10:2-16 for evidence of Saul's assurance of his mission in life. Ponder the statement in v. 13, "He went home" (Smith-Goodspeed), and in v. 16, "Concerning the matter of the kingdom . . . he told him not." How is one best able to meet the opportunities which come in life?

In this story Samuel seemed favorable to the monarchy. It was he who found Saul and called him to the kingship. Israel needed a leader to cope with the Philistine foe. The people had to be unified before they could recover from their defeats. The monarchy was the one way to save them from extinction.

The picture of Samuel in the story is a pleasing one. He was old but able. He was capable of assisting people in the ordinary experiences of daily life as well as aiding them in life's bigger problems. He was a practical man as well as a prophet of vision. He made Saul sure of the royal honors ahead of him, as sure as he was that the lost donkeys had been found.

Saul was a striking person, tall, well built, modest, courageous, enthusiastic, just the sort of leader needed to unify rival factions and inspire confidence against odds. He was of large mold. He had gone out a donkey hunter and had come back a king. He had yet to realize his kingdom, but he was carrying in his heart a definite object in life, that of freeing his people from the scourge of the Philistines.

In the meantime he had a wonderful interview with Samuel. The details of that homely meeting are not lacking. The providing of the fee, the careful advice of the girls at the well, the announcement concerning the recovered asses, the good dinner, the night on the roof of the house are as delightful as the solemn and secret anointing of Saul is impressive. The stranger had been royally entertained at the sacrificial banquet. Best of all, he had spent the night with a great man and they had talked things over. The seer had made clear to him God's saving purpose for Israel and his own part in that purpose. "Down at the end of the city" (9:27) in the early dawn this seer poured oil on the head of Saul and kissed him, advising him of specific experiences ahead which would supply him with certainty. The proverb of Saul among the prophets was a part of that experience, but after that he was to do as his hands should find, for God was with him (10:7*b*).

Reading 25: 1 Samuel 12

THE FINAL SPEECH OF SAMUEL

Observe the new kingship and Samuel's statement, "I am old and grayheaded, . . . and my sons are with you" (v. 2*b*). How would you characterize a true and able religious leader? Are integrity and honesty essential in his life and work? Study carefully Samuel's summary of his people's history. What is the nature of the moral order at work in the world? What counsel does this bring to men and nations in their conduct? Read 12:13-19 for Samuel's summary of the conditions which prevailed in his own day. What should be the fundamental motive in national life? Read 12:20-25 for Samuel's warning and promise for the future of his people. Is God's grace dependable? What was to be Samuel's attitude to the new order? Can the leaders of the passing generation serve those who carry on their work under new conditions?

The situation called for a king. The insight of Samuel, the prowess of Saul, and the dominance of the Philistine combined to speed his coming. Of dire necessity Saul began his rule with a firm hand. He was thrust into office with full support. With this new kingdom under way Samuel was ready to step aside. But first he had a few plain words for his people.

Samuel's own past was an open book, ready for strict scrutiny. As a unit the people bore testimony to his integrity and absolute honesty as a man and as a leader. He had been true himself and instructed his people in "the good and right way." He had never used his power for personal advantage. He had never violated the rights of others. He had never practiced favoritism. His influence had been free from duplicity.

Samuel summarized the past of his people in the spirit of the O. T. view of life. The moral order was operative in life. When the people forsook the ways of God, his hand was heavy upon them. But genuine repentance was always followed by deliverance. They could not forget their past. Desertion and double dealing had brought ruin, but God had been kind and gracious. He had been their real leader, and supreme loyalty to him was their only hope. Past history was full of counsel for the present. That the people should walk in the ways of the Lord with gratitude and reverence was as clear as day. The

value and continuance of the kingship depended on the loyalty of the people to the Lord. The real motive for their existence as a nation was not in liberty, or democracy, or empire, but in gratitude to God. Their future depended not merely on wealth or military defense, but on the genuine religion of the people. Otherwise emptiness and defeat were ahead for them (v. 21). However, the grace of God had persisted. It was dependable. His purpose had been to have a people unto himself who would walk in his ways, and that purpose would not be thwarted in the end. Such was the national consciousness in the heart of this stalwart man who stepped aside for the king.

Written Work.—After a thorough study of Samuel's final speech, write out six or eight things which you would emphasize in a talk on "Worthy Religious Leaders." Take into consideration Samuel's character and life, his relation to others, his attitude to progress, and his activities in vital projects. Review *Reading* 20 in connection with this, and consider the influence of the home and the sanctuary on religious leaders.

Reading 26: 1 Samuel 14:1-46

JONATHAN'S BOLD DEED AT MICHMASH

Read the story of the heroic attack of Jonathan and his armorbearer at Michmash. What was the secret of Jonathan's boldness? How did Jonathan learn of the overconfidence of the Philistines? Note the panic, the flight, and the rout of the foe. Who joined in this pursuit? Consider Jonathan's violation of Saul's rash edict. What was Jonathan's criticism of this oath of Saul? How did this vow imperil Jonathan and the people? Observe the efforts to correct the unfortunate results of this vow; notice the fine manhood of Jonathan and the people's recognition of noble service. Explain the belief behind the whole incident—vow, oracle, lot, demand for human sacrifice (*ABC,* p. 390).

Meeting no opposition, the Philistines became overconfident. They went out in parties to plunder. This was Jonathan's chance. By test questions (vv. 9-10) he became aware of this overconfidence. With bold, heroic action he and his mate confused the guards and left them without any chance to rally. The guards were not sure what they should do. In a very real sense they defeated themselves. The Hebrew captives, camp followers, and

soldiers rushed to the aid of their fellow countrymen. Saul even ordered the priests to stop consulting the oracle and join in the attack. Action, not worship, was the pressing need of the hour. The mob rushed wildly on in pursuit and that day became glorious in Israel's history.

But the foolish vow of Saul marred that glory. In his anxiety for victory and desire to impel his soldiers to decisive effort he laid a ban, or curse, on anyone who should stop to eat before nightfall. This had unfortunate results. Jonathan, ignorant of this ban, had refreshed himself with a little honey. The exhausted soldiers violated the priestly law in eating meat "with the blood."

Jonathan had criticised the vow. It prevented the soldiers from completing their victory. But he was ready to accept the decision of the lot as final. "I did indeed taste; . . . here I am, ready to die." (v. 43b—American Trans.) This was manhood at its best, frank, fearless, and sacrificial. The people also expressed their due appreciation of sacrificial service. Saul's response, "Yes, you must indeed die," was in line with the traditions of the past. But the people dared to go against tradition, superstition, and the decision of their king. Their good sense prevailed and prevented the useless sacrifice of Jonathan. Something deep in the heart of man holds in high regard those who minister and serve worthily.

Reading 27: 1 Samuel 15:10-33; 16:1-13

REJECTION OF SAUL AND ANOINTING OF DAVID

After reading Samuel's harsh judgment of Saul, account for the breach between the two leaders. Note Saul's confession and Samuel's cruelty. What religious and theological problems are involved in the slaying of Agag? How do you explain such treatment? Observe that God is represented as pleased with the hewing to death of Agag and angry at the sparing of some of the sheep and oxen of the Amalekites. Consider Samuel's grief and his cautious selection of the new king. Is positive and wise action nobler and more effective than just grief over an existing condition? What were David's commendable qualities for his new role? Observe that he was busy on a given task when consulted for the new position.

We do not know the full cause of the final break between Samuel and Saul. The roots of their breach ran deeper than a

single incident. Saul's self-will, disobedience, and sacrilege were marks of his failure to measure up to the hopes of the prophetic party. He ceased to be the instrument of this group.

Saul had violated the fundamental principle of the monarchy: he had failed to carry out the will of the Lord and had followed his own wishes. Samuel's emphasis on obedience was worthy. In principle it lifted religion from its outward sacramental expression into the realm of the spirit. But the fault of this sublime conception was that the wholesale massacre of a people was considered obedience to God and the sparing of cattle and people was condemned as disobedience.

With ch. 16 the interest passes from Saul to David. There was no hurried attempt to replace Saul. Samuel waited in hope of a better day and in search of a better king. The story of his anointing of David is a charming one with a splendid climax. David was unaware of what was happening. He was at his work keeping the sheep in the fields. Samuel was impressed the moment he saw the lad. He was sure of the man God had chosen for king, so without delay he poured the oil of consecration on David's head, thus making him king in Saul's place.

Reading 28: 1 Samuel 17

DAVID'S VICTORY OVER GOLIATH

Read vv. 1-11 for an understanding of Goliath's boastful challenge and its effect on the Hebrews. Observe that David is an untried and unknown stripling. Is the boastful attitude actually hurtful to its possessor, or just offensive to other people? Read vv. 32-37 on David's permission from Saul to fight the giant. Observe Saul's statement, "For thou are but a youth." Note, however, that the youth is rich in his experience of life and is conscious of his need of God. Would David's experience in the lesser conflicts of life, the fight with the lion and bear, serve as a preparation for the heavier struggles before him, the shouldering of the burdens and needs of his people? What was the final outcome of David's encounter with Goliath? What is the chief value of this story? Why has it come to be a general favorite? Does it discount self-sufficiency and boastfulness and emphasize reliance on God? Does the story set the kind of life exemplified in David over against and above the sort of life which Goliath exhibited?

We may never know the full circumstances under which David entered public life. The stories differ on certain points about the way he came into Saul's court. But three essential facts are clear in the stories: he defeated the Philistines, he was in Saul's service, and Saul became jealous of him to the point of seeking his life.

According to this story David came to camp by chance in the nick of time to save his people from defeat. He volunteered to fight Goliath with his sling, and won the permission of Saul to accept the giant's challenge. After casting aside the armor of Saul, with explicit confidence in his God, he won an almost miraculous victory over his boastful foe with his own simple slingshot. Such a heroic deed would certainly win Saul's favor. Doubtless this was not his only qualification for being at the king's court. But his skill as a fighter opened the way for his career, and he began to rise in popular favor almost from the moment of his meeting with Saul. Soon, however, excessive praises of his feat in popular song aroused the jealousy of Saul and moved him to seek David's life. Gradually Saul faded from the picture and the biblical story centered around David.

This story of David and the giant is a blend of historical exploits and dramatic skill. As such it has become a beautiful and spiritually useful literary gem. David was full master of the situation at hand. But his concern was for his God and not for himself. He ascribed his deliverance in the past to the power of his God, and his confidence for the future rested in God and not in his own prowess. The Hebrew accepted the practical rather than the theoretical omnipotence of God.

Reading 29: 1 Samuel 18:6-30

SAUL'S JEALOUSY OF DAVID

Account for Saul's jealousy. What was the effect of the popular song on Saul? Was David a real threat to Saul's position? What worthier course of action was open to Saul under such conditions? Compare the attitude of John the Baptist to Jesus under a similar situation (Jn. 3:26-27). Does the ultimate success of a cause depend on God's sanction? Are the final issues of all things in the hands of God? Was Saul's jealousy due to his own depressed spirit? Note the ways in which Saul's jealousy expressed itself, and how he tried to get rid of David.

Was Saul's jealousy enhanced by David's successes or by his own fears and sense of failure? Make a list of Saul's hostile efforts against David. What is the best cure for jealousy? Can it be nipped in the bud? Does remembering that we are our brother's keeper have any bearing on the extinction of jealousy?

The experience of David at the court of Saul was valuable for him. The people came to know him and he met the leaders of all classes. He came to know the problems and needs of the people at first hand. His charm won the favor of all ranks. The song of the jubilant women was based on his brilliant achievements. He became a real threat to Saul's position. The kingship was not yet a fixed institution. Saul had come into it through his military prowess, and now his record was excelled by David. There is no reason to believe that David attempted to undermine Saul, but general conditions provided room for Saul's suspicion. And his own malady, with its moments of black depression, his fears, and his sense of failure, moved him to occupy the open room.

Saul's jealousy expressed itself in increasing measure. At first it was merely suspicion which led him to watch everything David did (v. 9). Soon he severed personal contact with him by removing David to a new position, that of captain over a thousand. But this only brought him in touch with the army, a contact which furnished new opportunities for his ability. "All Israel and Judah loved David; for he went out and came in before [the people]" (v. 16). Even Michal, the daughter of Saul, fell in love with the young hero. All this aroused fears in Saul's mind, and there was no freedom from these in face of the uncanny success of his rival. This brought Saul to brooding on his own failures. He was to go as David came. His plot for David's death in combat, through his demands of the dowry for Michal, signally failed. This was followed by open measures in which Saul urged Jonathan and his group to kill David. Jonathan was averse to this and was able to bring the generous nature of the king to the fore for a time. But soon afterward fresh victories by David brought a return of Saul's fears which swept aside all concealment. By his own hand Saul tried to kill the one who was seeking to dispel his gloom. As David slipped away, Saul ordered his arrest at his own home. His death was demanded. However, Saul's own daughter contrived

an escape for her husband, which served to confirm the king in his belief that all were against him and for the preservation of David. By giving vent to his jealousy he had permitted it to become a rage beyond control.

Reading 30: 1 Samuel 18:1-5; 19:1-10; 20:1-42

THE FRIENDSHIP OF DAVID AND JONATHAN

Consider the friendship of David and Jonathan. Note the meaning of "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David" and "Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Why did Jonathan give his clothes and armor to David? What was the basis of Jonathan's covenant with David? Is love the only basis for enduring friendship? The evidences of Jonathan's friendship for David are many. Did Jonathan have conflicting loyalties? Could he be loyal to both family and friend? Why was Jonathan fond of David, and why did he plead with his father to refrain from killing him? Note that David had risked his life for his people, had been noble toward Saul, and had the sanction of God on his life. Do character and conduct enter into friendship?

Read ch. 20 and note the steps in the plan for obtaining Saul's real attitude toward David. What are the manifestations of friendship? Must one always comply with the wishes of a friend? Could David and Jonathan remain apart and be friends? Contrast Saul's treatment of Jonathan with Jonathan's reply, "What hath he done?"

Jonathan's life was of high order. He is one of the most attractive persons in the O. T., brave and noble in his soul. He was frank, warm hearted, able and clear in judgment, loyal in worthy relationships, and not lacking in deeds of prowess and sacrifice for the good of his people. "In David's impressionable years his close friendship with such a trustworthy, faithful, large-minded, disinterested, self-sacrificing nature was providential." (F. K. Sanders, *History of the Hebrews.*) Likewise David's ability and service record had their appeal for Jonathan.

The highest kind of friendship rests upon the character and real worth of friends, and only such a friendship will last. The noble character and services of Jonathan and David, the high ideals which they shared and to which they were loyal illustrate the real basis of this abiding friendship. Genuine worth is never

subject to the shifting moods of men. The desires and pretensions of men sink out of sight in the presence of such. The manifestations of friendship also range around the qualities that inhere in character and life. It is here that friendships are formed and builded and find their meaning. Likewise it is by lack of due consideration of these matters that friendships are broken. Apart from genuine worth there can be no genuine friendship. The basis, the proof, and the manifestations of friendship are not apart from the earnest search for truth and the honest consideration of goodness. Friends do not always see alike, think alike, and vote alike. But they are always one in their sincerity of purpose and in their loyalty to truth as they know it.

Written Work.—With this story of Jonathan and David as a background write out a brief sermon on "The Glories of Friendship" such as you might preach to a body of high school students in your section. Remember that you have an opportunity to enrich the life of this group, to open for them paths which they would otherwise miss. Be concerned with the foundation, the expression, and the enduring qualities of friendship.

Reading 31: 1 Samuel 22:1–23:5

DAVID AND HIS BAND OF OUTLAWS

Consider the people composing David's band. Why did they come to David? How did the group support itself? What was the value of this experience for David? Note David's concern for his parents. Why did he transfer them to Moab? Did he have relatives there? Why was David so considerate of Abiathar? Did he feel that his former deception had endangered the priest? Could this priest serve him later? What influenced David to aid Keilah? Why did his men hesitate in this undertaking? How did this deliverance influence Saul?

David's band of outlaws was not a collection of rascals. It was a mixed group of unfortunates and malcontents. They included warriors from his father's clan, refugees from Saul's court, and men from neighboring tribes who were broken in fortune, some of them through persecution and robbery. The group had no visible means of support and were thoroughly loyal to David. They must either steal from their fellow Hebrews or secure food from them for helpful service in re-

turn. They preferred the latter method, and many of their acts were the deeds of brave men.

This experience was valuable for David. The stern discipline of wilderness life and warfare developed in him qualities of leadership, courage, self-reliance, and resourcefulness. Many of these men became his trusted leaders later. These, too, the people whom David served, would later be his subjects. As an exile from Saul's court he was in a position to form alliances with the nation's foes. As leader of the rough, mixed element that gathered about him, David received valuable training for his coming rule over the jealous warring factions of Israel. In religion, too, he stood in need of experience, instruction, and growth. Although he was the devoted servant of the Lord, his ideas of religion were crude, allowing for deeds of great cruelty.

We should not overlook the worthy deeds of David during his life as an outlaw. Recognizing that his father and mother would not be safe in Saul's kingdom, he found shelter and hospitality for them with the Moabites. The fleeing Abiathar was more than the recipient of his regrets. He became the object of his care. "Remain with me, fear not; . . . for you shall be a charge to me" (22:23—Smith-Goodspeed). The robbery of the threshing floors of Keilah by the Philistines moved David to action. Although an exile he was still loyal to the Hebrew cause. His banishment from Saul and the dangers arising from Saul's efforts to kill him did not prevent him from protecting the simple rights of the people.

Reading 32: 1 Samuel 24; 26

MERCIFUL DAVID AND PENITENT SAUL

Observe how David and his men differed in their views of the proper treatment for Saul? Why did David object to the death of Saul? Was his objection due to his love for Saul, his respect for kings, or the greatness of his own spirit? What was the real basis of the Davidic dynasty? Study carefully Saul's confession and repentance. Did the generosity and mercy of David shame him to penitence, or did he still carry in his heart a love for David and for the good?

During Saul's relentless efforts to kill David a remarkable incident occurred. Saul fell into David's power, and David let him go. This made its deep impression on the public. It has

been reported in two forms, in chs. 24 and 26, the main features being the same. There was something fine, something kingly, about David's forbearance and his refusal of revenge. Saul was overcome. He saw the evil of his own conduct. "Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly" (26:21*b*). He was aware of the righteousness of David and of the good which he had rendered. He supported, for the time at least, his confession with the correction of his conduct: "Return, my son David; for I will no more do thee harm" (26:21*a*).

We need to go back of his mental disorder for the real Saul. In his heart he loved David. At bottom he was generous in his nature. But jealousy, superstition, and hatred had turned him against those he held most dear. The sound of David's well-remembered voice and the knowledge of his considerate deed released a flood of healing emotion. For the moment he was lifted out of his diseased condition into his best self. He was conscious of his faults and frankly acknowledged them. The fears which harassed his mind were also in evidence. He wanted to be sure that his seed after him would not be "cut off" and that his "name" would not be destroyed out of his father's house. We see here the Saul that might have been if he had trusted David instead of turning against him. This is a pathetic revelation of a man who failed to realize his true life. But mere promises and pledges were not sufficient to prevent the return of his black moods.

The decisive factor in David's kingdom was not his charming, winsome personality. It was more than his valor and prowess. Many Oriental rulers before him had mounted the throne by murdering their predecessors. The view of Mattathias is significant: "David for being merciful inherited the throne of a kingdom for ever and ever" (1 Macc. 2:57). The Hebrew believed that a king held a special position which had the sanction of God. But his theory of the divine right of kings was supplemented by his belief in the heavy responsibility of kings.

Reading 33: 1 Samuel 25:1-43

DAVID'S RELATION TO NABAL AND ABIGAIL

Observe the character and possessions of Nabal. Is a person's character molded in part by his possessions and his attitude toward them? Do we still need to remind ourselves that

life is a grander thing than food and clothing? Consider the character and conduct of Abigail. The "present" which she carried to David and his men included most of the foods known to the early Hebrews. What were the motive and outcome of her quick response? How did she protect both Nabal and David by her act? Note David's wedding in the wilderness. Would this enhance his social standing? Would this strengthen his position among the tribes? Was it prompted by true love?

In the highlands of southern Judah near the village of Carmel were broad fertile fields. The great sheepmaster Nabal was the dominating figure of this whole area. David and his bandits camped all winter on the border of this region. They were friends to Nabal's shepherds. Winter is the growing time for crops in Palestine. During these months the outlaws refrained from harm, and even protected the flocks from robber bands. But when harvest came David demanded a share of the crops as a reward for not having molested Nabal. The unwritten law of the borderland was that neighboring nomadic tribesmen should be paid for refraining from attack. Further, the law of hospitality required that those who had possessions should share liberally with those who had not, especially at festival time. In demanding a liberal gift David was well within the customary law of the wilderness. Nabal's refusal was an insult.

Abigail realized the outcome of such insolence. With charm and tact she came to the rescue of both Nabal and David. By her gracious manner, her humility and frank acknowledgement of the truth of the charges against her foolish husband, her generous gift and wise counsel, she appeased the anger and won the admiration of David and his men. She saved the day for David and held him back from a great crime. However, Nabal's days were few. The bad news brought by Abigail supported by his intemperate habits apparently brought on a stroke which proved fatal. In the thinking of that day the sudden death was a divine judgment.

With the death of Nabal the way was open for David's marriage to Abigail. It was the custom among the Oriental tribes of that day for a man to have more than one wife. However, with the Hebrews this practice was limited largely to tribal chieftains and kings. At times they wished to extend their power and influence through alliance with other tribes and peoples.

The accepted method of sealing such alliances was by intermarriage. Without doubt David's marriage with Abigail lifted his social standing as well as strengthened his position with the near-by tribes. But there is evidence that it was prompted by true love. It brought David a wise and loyal counselor.

Reading 34: 1 Samuel 28:3-25

SAUL'S VISIT TO THE WITCH OF ENDOR

As you read this story consider the helpless, depressed, and dispirited condition of Saul. What is the central emphasis in the story: the medium, the ghost of Samuel, the "controls," or the plight of Saul? Try to understand the midnight scene at Endor. With the aid of *ABC* (pp. 396*b*-97) decide the meaning of the following terms: spirit or supernatural figure, talisman or controls, medium, seance, and tapping. How does magic differ from true religion in its view of the other world? Observe the message of the witch to Saul. What was the source of this message —the spirit of Samuel, the existing political situation, or the "tapping" of Saul's unconscious mind?

The tragic plight of Saul is of supreme importance in this story. Samuel was dead; David and his men were out of reach and growing in favor; the people, including his own children, seemed against Saul; the deadly struggle of the powerful Philistines was at hand; and there was no support or counsel from the priests and prophets. Saul was indeed "sore distressed." His life and that of his people were in danger. The strong enemy was before him. But Saul had lost his sense of divine mission. He no longer felt the approval of his God. "God is departed from me, and answereth me no more." (v. 15.) His deepest uncertainty was not from his outward lot in life. He was not afraid to do his duty, if he had known what to do. He was ready to die with his face to the foe. His greatest bitterness was his sense that God had rejected him. There was no counsel or comfort for him, and his course was confused. He had lost the stabilizing influence which comes from a sense of mission and a feeling of divine approval and guidance.

In his desperation Saul turned to spiritism. The sitting which the witch reluctantly allowed to Saul is true to the pattern of the spiritualists across the years. The witch, or medium, "tapped" the mind of Saul, perhaps by the use of a talisman or some ob-

ject of "control," and found his desire for the counsel of Samuel and his apprehension of his own fate. At this the medium, not Saul, in a partial trance reported that she saw a spirit coming up out of the earth. This she described, and Saul recognized the description as that of Samuel. After proper obeisance he made his request, "Tell me what I should do." We should observe that it was the medium, or witch, who saw the spirit and described it, and that Saul heard the message of Samuel only after the apparition had been described to him.

The message from Samuel was not strange. It was not different from the one already in the thoughts of Saul. The "spirit" was telling him what his conscience had told him already. The message was inherent in the political situation. Before the powerful Philistines defeat and death awaited the Hebrews and Saul.

Reading 35: 1 Samuel 29–30

DAVID AND HIS DESOLATE HOME

Observe David's perplexity in the final battle of the Philistines against Saul. Why did the Philistine generals deny David a place in their army? Did David have to be a traitor at this battle? Note the desolation which faced David and his men on their return home. What was the source of David's courage amid his grief and danger? Did his sense of right and divine approval support him? Consider the way in which law comes into being. Was David's decision fair? Was this an effort to halt greed? Does 30:26 show David to be generous or shrewd?

David's headquarters were at Ziklag. As Saul's last battle with the Philistines was taking shape at Gilboa, the king of Gath called for David as captain of his bodyguard. This placed David in an awkward situation. He could not avoid being a traitor, either to Achish or to Saul. He had to decide whether he fought against or with the Hebrews. Nevertheless David went with Achish to join the Philistine troops. The other generals, however, refused to allow him a part in the battle, and David was sent back to his quarters with high commendations for his record in service and in loyalty.

But David went back to a desolate home. Ziklag had been raided and burned. The families and property had been taken away by the Amalekites. For a time David's men were in a spirit of mutiny. Popular indignation ran high against David.

Grief was turned into anger, and it is always easy for anger to blame rulers for calamities and thwarted desires. But for David wise action was better than just tears and words in the presence of desolation. With courage and full reliance on his God, he took steps to repair the desolations of his people and rebuild his home. David knew what it was to stand alone against odds in the consciousness of what he considered right, for he was convinced that the favor of God was upon him and his task.

A dispute arose among David's men over the question of their pay, or share in the spoils. David's decision that "they shall share alike"—those who stayed by the baggage and those who went to the front (v. 24)—became a precedent. This law came into being through a response to a need. The Hebrew laws, like those of all peoples, arose gradually and came out of life.

Reading 36: I Samuel 31:1—2 Samuel 1:16; 1 Chronicles 10:1-14

THE DEATH OF SAUL

Observe the quick flight of the Hebrews and the firm stand of Saul and his sons. How account for the loss of this battle? Is the spirit in which men take up their task important? Mark the manner of Saul's death. Observe the two reports on that fact. On what essential matter do these reports agree? Was Saul a coward or a man of honor? Contrast the attitudes and behavior of the Philistines and the men of Jabesh-gilead at Saul's death. Is gratitude a worthy motive in conduct?

The books of First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah form a history of the Hebrews written much later than the narrative in the books of Samuel and Kings. This history was from a different point of view: it reflected the priestly ideals instead of the prophetic ones found in the older writings. Its chief interest was in Judah and David. The bulk of its material treats of the reigns of David and Solomon (Chr. 1-2; Chr. 9:31). The time prior to David was summarized in a series of family or tribal tables (1 Chr. 1:1–9:44), and the time after Solomon until the captivity of Judah was presented in Chronicles and portions of the postexilic history in Ezra and Nehemiah. The significance of Chronicles will be noted later in connection with the study of Ezra and Nehemiah. It will, however,

be helpful to study the priestly passage in Chronicles bearing on the Readings from here on in Samuel and Kings.

The Philistines surpassed the Hebrews in numbers and weapons at the battle of Gilboa. But the Hebrews were on their favorite fighting ground, the hilltop. Mount Gilboa offered great advantages for defense. This, however, availed them little, for the hopelessness of Saul and the low morale of his men had lost the battle before it was fought. Under attack the soldiers offered but slight resistance. Their defeat soon turned into rout. The people of the villages near by fled in panic, leaving their homes to the foe. But Saul and his sons perished on the field of battle, fighting bravely for unrealized hope.

We may never know the full facts of the end of Saul's life. Two reports were current. The one was that Saul, after the flight of his men and the death of his sons, was severely wounded. To avoid the torture of the enemy and the disgrace of capture, he urged his armorbearer to run him through with the sword. When the latter refused, through reverence for the person of the Lord's anointed, Saul fell upon his sword to end his own life. The other report stated that Saul was killed by an Amalekite camp follower. With defeat certain Saul, unwounded but suffering from dizziness, begged for his own end, which the Amalekite willingly granted. The exact facts of Saul's death matter little to us, but that he died on the field of battle has its appeal. He deserved better treatment than was meted out.

Saul's headless body exhibited on the walls of Beth-shan and his severed head circulating through the land of the enemy may have brought "good tidings" to the Philistines and their gods; but not so to the men of Jabesh-gilead, whose kind deed brightens the record of Saul's gloomy end. At great personal risk these men marched all night to rescue the bodies of Saul and his sons from their shameful position and give their bones decent burial near their own homes. Their kindness was rooted in gratitude, for the eyes and freedom of these men had been saved by Saul at an earlier day (1 Sam. 11.) Evidences of kindness, freedom, and gratitude, too rare then as now, shine forth as stars out of that black night of cruelty.

Written Work.—Use this incident of the men of Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam. 31:11-13) as the basis of a brief sermon on "Genuine Gratitude." Outline this sermon and write it out in

full. Remember that the sermon may influence your community in its treatment of its returned soldiers. It provides you with a chance to foster good will and to awaken new and fuller appreciations among the members of your families.

Reading 37: 2 Samuel 1:17-27

DAVID'S LAMENT OVER SAUL AND JONATHAN

Read the poem for its train of thought: lament over the national disaster (v. 19); recoil from allowing the bad news to delight the foe (v. 20); the curse on Mount Gilboa, where the heroes were slain (v. 21); praise for the virtues of the slain heroes (vv. 22-23); exhortation to the daughters of Israel, leaders in lamentation (vv. 24-25*a*); and personal lament over the loss of a dear friend (vv. 25*b*-27). What were the chief losses which David's grief felt? Observe that this dirge is free from sentimentalism, from bitterness, from revenge and past enmity, and has no reference to God and religion. Recall that this poem was written more than a thousand years B.C. Is the outlook of David in this poem of personal and national grief fundamentally religious? Observe that the poem is artistic and noble in its expression. The beauty of its language, its imagery, its repetition of words, its somber refrain, its musical stress—all these are very impressive. Does fineness of expression enhance the power of ideas? Should a minister study correct and forceful ways of expressing himself? Can the effect of a sermon be ruined through faulty expression and poor delivery?

The death of Saul was a genuine sorrow to many people. But no one mourned more deeply or more sincerely than David. This noble dirge was more than his effort to placate the northern tribes. It showed the sorrow of David's heart. The very nature of the poem in Hebrew—rising from the quick two-beat measure, through the three-beat to the four-beat, and then back to a fall in the last refrain—gives the effect of the final sob of the heart. The battle of Gilboa held three heavy losses for David. The poem stresses these as it voices David's grief over the national disaster; over the loss of strong leaders, swifter than eagles and stronger than lions; and over the loss of a beloved personal friend. David viewed the virtues of Israel's two leaders and his personal friendship as of supreme worth. The courage,

the valor, and the achievement of Saul and Jonathan seemed to him without limit. Their efforts were united, strong, and never empty. But the mighty had fallen, the weapons of war—for such were these two heroes—had perished. In the closing stanza David glorifies personal friendship as he recalls Jonathan's delightsome life and deathless love. The love of the bride for her husband and the love of the mother for her son have been superb examples of love at its best from beyond the memory of man. But here one man's love for another, Jonathan's love for David, is called wonderful, "passing the love of women."

This poem is one of the great elegies of literature. It is an utterance of deep and genuine sorrow, an abiding expression of personal and national grief. While the claim of many that the poem is "in no sense religious" and "entirely without religious content" (see *ABC,* pp. 398*b*-99), is well founded, the elegy nevertheless lifts high the qualities of life that have their origin and sanction in religion. When we recall Saul's treatment of David through life and realize that this high-minded poem from David is without pettiness or personal ambition or bitterness, without resentment or gleeful satisfaction, we cannot but recognize that the author was fundamentally religious and that the abiding values of religion had entered his life.

Reading 38: 2 Samuel 2–4; 1 Chronicles 11:1-9

DAVID AS KING OF JUDAH AT HEBRON

Recognize the two dreams of David. He was now king over Judah, and the prospects of his rule over Israel were bright. Why did he write to the men of Jabesh-gilead? Was he sincere in his commendation of these men's kindness to Saul? Consider the way in which Abner thwarted David's hope. Was Ish-bosheth (or Ishbaal) a child, or just lacking in ability? What was the real cause of the war between the two houses? How account for the bitter enmity between Joab and Abner? Was their bitterness more than blood feud? Were the two leaders rivals, the one a threat to the other's position? Consider Abner's break with Ishbaal (or Ish-bosheth), his deal with David, and Joab's murder of Abner. Did Abner's death hinder or foster David's ambition to rule Israel? Make a list of the virtues and faults of

Joab, of Abner, and of David. Would a thorough study of these characters furnish a message for life today?

David had been seeking the headship of Judah for a long time. He had used his period of banishment for cultivating friends. With the death of Saul and his three sons a new prospect opened for David—that of becoming king over all Israel. The first of his dreams was soon realized. With characteristic alertness David and his band moved to Hebron, and by popular choice he was anointed king over the house of Judah. For his unrealized dream he sought to identify himself with Saul's house. The "good will" of this house would bring him into favor with the northern group of his people. This ambition was reflected in his letter of praise to the men of Jabesh-gilead. "Let your hands be strong; . . . for Saul your lord is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them." (2 Sam. 2:7.) This was a bid for support in the region where the house of Saul was strong.

But the time was not yet ripe for David. Abner, as captain of Saul's host, quickly set up Ishbaal, the only surviving son of Saul, as king over Israel, with headquarters across the Jordan. This was a blow to the hope of David. The two kingdoms became rivals, and a long war ensued. In the bitter conflict Abner and Joab came into prominence as rival leaders.

Joab was devoted to the cause of David, but he was a man without fear or scruple. Consideration and forgiveness were foreign to his nature. Soon he was involved in blood feud with Abner, his rival commander. Abner, much nobler in character, sought to avoid bloodshed and to maintain his loyalty to his own incompetent king. But in both these aims he failed.

Soon Abner, stung by a merited rebuke from his puppet king, offered to turn over "all Israel" to David. But David conditioned the parley on the return of Michal, who was the daughter of Saul. With this granted David was before the public as the heir of Saul. With the full approval of his elders, Abner went to Hebron with the kingdom in his pocket, as it were. We do not know the price which David was to pay. Evidently the considerations were not small. The promises were made and the obligation accepted.

However, Joab's treacherous murder of Abner at the very gate of Hebron brought an end to David's agreement. What is

more, his ambition to rule the north was imperiled, for this was a bitter crime in the eyes of the north. But David was equal to the occasion. He strongly disavowed the deed and his ability to control the ruthless Joab and his group. He arranged for Abner's honorable burial with public mourning, composing over him a most fitting dirge. The people of Israel regarded his lament as sincere grief, and not mere policy. David's tact, his upright record, his trusted personal confidence, and his frank confession of his own limitation and weakness, all of which extended over the years, were too strong for the winds of suspicion.

Written Work.—Outline and write out in full a talk which you would make to the men of your church at some informal meeting. Let your talk be on "The common faults and noble virtues of men." Before writing your talk make a list of the virtues and faults of Joab, of Abner, and of David.

Reading 39: 2 Samuel 5:1-16

DAVID'S NEW KINGDOM AND ITS CAPITAL

This *Reading* deals with the establishment of David's rule over all Israel. Observe the people's share in their government. David's kingship was by agreement. He entered into a covenant with his subjects, when sought by them. He was anointed by the heads of the tribes, not by priests. With what was that covenant concerned, the rights or the duties of the king? Note the capture of the capital. What advantages had Jerusalem as the seat of the new government? Who led in the capture of the fortress and by what method? How was the place improved for its new role? By the use of the comments in ABC (p. 400) decide the meaning of "city of David" (v. 9), "water course" (v. 8), and the reference to "the blind and the lame" (vv. 6, 8).

The Hebrews were faced with the dilemma of enduring the Philistine yoke or accepting the rule of one leader who was strong enough to unite the people and restore their freedom. For this all eyes were fixed on David. He had not offended the northern forces. He had served with Saul and had "led out and brought in Israel." He had been anointed by Samuel and by the leaders at Hebron. He was able and agreeable, with a record of forthrightness. The people of their own accord went to Hebron to consult David.

In a sense David was king by "divine right," as "the anointed of the Lord." But the leaders approached him for the position and entered into an agreement with him. His authority was not absolute, but constitutional. There was a covenant between the king and his subjects, and it must have dealt with duties as well as rights. The heads of the tribes, and not the priests of religion, were leaders in the solemn acts of anointing the king.

The selection of Jerusalem for the new capital was an act of statesmanship. This was common ground, outside the sectional jealousy of rival tribes. It was midway between the north and south, and its possession removed the separating fortress of the enemy. Too, the hill was a mighty stronghold, a coveted site since the stone ages. It was easily defensible and hard to attack. With a natural defense on three sides—the Kidron ravine on the east, the valley of Hinnom on the south, and the valley of the Tyropoean on the west—the city was approachable only from the north, and this side was defended by a moat and a thick wall. At the base of the ridge of this stony hill on the outside of the wall was the Gihon spring. This was the water supply of "Davidsburg." By means of a concealed tunnel, shafts, and rooms, the water was brought inside the fortress.

The hill had its vulnerable point. That spring cave had an opening to the outside. As insults were shouted back and forth between the defenders and the attackers (v. 8), a scout found the passage to the spring and climbed through the tunnel. The Jebusites were caught between these attackers from behind and those entering through a breach in the north wall.

With the capital placed, David took steps at once for its improvement. The encircling wall from Millo was built, and through the aid of the king of Tyre the new palace for David was set in order. An influx of population, the sparing of the lives of the conquered, and the enlarged military defenses gave to David a safe and imposing capital for his new kingdom.

Reading 40: 2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 13;15–16

THE ARK BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM

Consider the splendor which surrounded the transfer of the ark by David. Did David wish this to be an impressive state occasion? Would such a ceremony serve to advance religion? Note the mysterious incident on the way to Jerusalem. Would

this take from the occasion its emphasis on religion? Was this believed to be punishment from God? Are the interpretations of events by men sometimes wrong? Consider David's behavior before the ark, Michal's sarcastic criticism, and David's reaction to her statement. Note also the joyous sacrifices offered on the way and at the tent which was to house the ark. Was Michal for respectability in religion? Was David reacting against "cold decorum" in religion? Can religion be overrich in its emotional and too poor in its intellectual content?

David's effort to bring the ark to his captured stronghold was a part of his whole nationalizing policy. He planned to make his new capital a center of political, social, and religious influence such as would quicken the pride and loyalty of all. The ark was brought from the house of Abinadab with considerable pomp. It was a state occasion for religion. There were plenty of other shrines, but the eyes of all were turned to this one, now that Jehovah's home was to be at Jerusalem.

But the joyous and impressive occasion was marred by a perplexing incident. One of the attendants fell dead on the spot as he steadied the ark. This was interpreted as punishment from God for the man's irreverence in touching a holy object. The death could have been from heart trouble, implemented through exertion and fear, but for the Hebrew all things issued directly from God. The prophetic conception of God as just and righteous and loving was not yet in vogue. Even David was frightened and angered by this affair. His efforts had failed. God was unfair. The ark must stop outside Zion, in the house of a Philistine soldier. But the home of that soldier prospered under the presence of the ark.

This encouraged David to move the ark on to his fortress. This time it was carried on the shoulers of men, amid the sacrifice of joy and thanksgiving. David, dressed in the scanty garment of the priests, danced and whirled enthusiastically before it. At the tent which was to receive the chest there was sacrifice again before the people went to their homes.

Michal, the wife of David, was enraged at this unconventional conduct. Her sarcastic jibe, tense with the bitterness which had festered in her heart, was not well received by David. He made no effort to soothe her anger, but retorted with a jibe at her

father's house, declaring that he himself would act even more shamelessly in the future.

The presence of the ark in Jerusalem meant much for David's throne. It was the symbol of the personal presence of Jehovah. Religion was lifted into prominence as the people turned with full devotion to this symbol of their God. The religious aspirations of the whole nation were focused on David's capital. Here again the religious insights, symbols, and customs of that day were different from those of our own time. Experience is man's greatest teacher and religion illustrates the principle. A living church must not adhere strictly to the traditions and beliefs that have come from a less enlightened period. The church must face forward as well as remember the past. Its eyes are fixed on a living Lord and open to life in all its glories.

Reading 41: 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17

DAVID'S PLAN FOR A TEMPLE OF GOD

David was interested in a temple of worship. From his own peace and security he turned in gratitude to God. Is it unbecoming for people to make unworthy provisions for religion? Why did Nathan oppose the building of a temple? Does conservatism ever hinder progress in religion? Note the play on the word "house." God will build David a house, that is, assure him of sons and posterity after him. Are men of worth a suitable house for God? Does he dwell in the souls of men? Is this body of ours the temple of God (see 1 Cor. 3:16)? What is the chief emphasis in David's humble thanksgiving prayer? The prayer contains the confession and gratitude of David as well as his intercession for Israel.

David considered building a house for God. He lived in a house himself, and peace reigned among his people. To continue the worship of God in a tent was to deny him his rightful place of honor in religion. At first Nathan, the court prophet, warmly approved David's plan, but after due consideration he vetoed it. It was an innovation. A tent had housed the worship of God in the days of Moses, and those were the great days of Israel. The traditions, the holy associations, of the tent were uplifting. To turn to a temple which was heathen in its associations would be a breach of tradition.

We do well to realize that tent and temple alike may be disas-

trous to genuine religion. One can make a fetish of a tent as well as of a temple. One can hold to the conservative traditions of a tent to the detriment of progress. Likewise one can glorify the bricks and mortar of a temple, the splendor of its ceremonies and services, above the increase of true religion. A temple can be "aesthetically splendid but spiritually disastrous" (*ABC,* p. 402*a*). A tent is a fitting symbol for the church, for the pilgrim people of God who have no continuing city with men; but to make of a tent an unchanging tradition is to belittle the spacious rooms of God. Adequate buildings, splendid and spacious temples, have their use in religion—but do not take its place.

David was not permitted to build God a house, but God built David a house. The house for which God cares supremely is that of worthy men and women. He takes up his abode within the souls of men. The real home of God is in the heart of man, and in this sense the N. T. talks of men as "the temple of the Holy Spirit." In David's grateful prayer of thanks (vv. 18*b*-29) he was concerned about the worth and values in the existing dynasty and about the continuance of that worth. To that end, with confession and humility, he made intercession for the people of Israel. Whether people worship in a tent or in a temple, there is one thing needful, that they establish in their hearts an abiding home for God and make room for him in their lives.

Reading 42: 2 Samuel 11:2-27

DAVID'S SORDID SIN AND DELIBERATE CRIME

How account for David's adultery with Bathsheba? Consider the atmosphere in which he lived, the relaxation of moral standards, the luxury and ease of rulers, the reach for pleasure, the intrigues of the harem, and the irregularities of wartime. Observe the ways in which David tried to hide his sin. Does one sin lead to another? Can one cover up sin by plunging deeper into it? What is the only way to counteract sin? Note Uriah's disturbing piety and David's distress and dishonesty. Observe David's plans for the murder of Uriah. Sin weaves a tangled web. The evildoer goes to any lengths to escape detection, even resorting to murder. There is irony in Uriah's deliverance of the letter that calls for his own death. Did David's own generation condemn him for this act?

Scholars generally recognize an earlier and a later source for our extensive knowledge and understanding of David. The earlier source deals with the latter part of his life, and is of great literary value. It includes chs. 9-20 of Second Samuel and chs. 1-2 of First Kings. This biography of David is, according to Mary Ellen Chase, the "most outstanding work in ancient Hebbrew prose" a literary masterpiece. As such it presents the pathetic tragedy of David's closing years.

The Oriental court was the dark background of this sin and crime of David. The vices of luxury flourished. The jealousies of the harem were many. Under the influence of prosperity the moral fiber became flabby and standards were relaxed. The lure of pleasure fashioned its selfish intrigues. The combined influences touched even the noble king, who at the very acme of his prosperity weakened beyond the point of effective resistance to such strong temptations. Without hesitation he sent for Bathsheba, and the two committed adultery together.

All ancient codes were severe in their punishment of adultery. It was a sin against society more terrible than murder. The Hebrew ordered that the guilty be stoned to death by the community. The family was basic in the welfare of society. Here man became a creator of life. There was no diviner function, and he who perverted that gift defied God.

David, like many other culprits, tried to cover up his acts of shame. His dishonesty in trying to have it appear that Uriah was the father of the child-to-be failed through the gallant loyalty of the returned soldier. Neither did his effort to have the sturdy soldier forget his resolution through improvised drunkenness meet with success. With detection still possible, he fashioned his murderous scheme which was carried out in cold blood. This brought Bathsheba to David as a favored and influential member of his harem, but it also brought down upon him the outrage of a horrified people, and this at a time when a king was considered responsible only to God for his acts.

Reading 43: 2 Samuel 12:1-23

NATHAN'S REBUKE AND THE DEATH OF DAVID'S CHILD

Try to feel the power of this simple parable of the little lamb. It moved David to fury and ready decision. Note that hospitality to the traveler was imperative. How could Nathan

reprove the king so severely without the loss of his own life? Is it easier for a prophet to denounce than to convince? Consider Nathan's application of his parable and David's response. "Thou art the man" came with abrupt force. In spite of his large household David had murdered Uriah to steal his wife. There would be terrible punishment. Note David's conviction and confession of his sin. Was his repentance deep enough to allow his better qualities to reassert themselves? Was he sorry for the act, or grieved over its consequences? Observe the sick child, the frantic prayer and fasting of David, the death of the child, and David's strange conduct. Was David's behavior at the death of his child heartless or just the grim acceptance of fate?

The public greatly resented David's crime against Uriah, and the parable of the little lamb is the prophet's protest. This parable is one of the classics of the O. T. With simple, concise language Nathan set forth in poetic form the principles which he urged David not only to accept but to apply as well. The analogy between David and the rich man was to the point, for he with all his grandeur had coveted and had taken the wife of one of his brave warriors. Nathan was appealing to David's sense of justice and pity as well as speaking for the heart of his people, whose sound ideals allowed for no such mean and shameful acts.

That David was man enough to acknowledge his weakness is admirable. His confession of his sin was without restraint. But his life lacked the fruits of repentance. There is no evidence that he reasserted the diviner elements of his life. Bathsheba remained the dominant power in his heart and court, and through Solomon, a later offspring of this alliance, brought shame on the king, his family, and his people.

Certain things in this incident of the child's death seem strange to us. We cannot believe that God brought death to the child because of the sin of David. For the Hebrew, God's moral order was such that suffering and sorrow must follow in the wake of sin. They had no conception of the rule of natural law which enters into our thinking. They had no developed sense of the individual or of individual responsibility. With them the family was thought of as a whole. That man was a member of a family was an important fact. Their view of history as the revelation of God's moral order and their belief

in the unity of the family left little room for our recognition of "the uniformity of nature" and the importance of a man as a person. Study carefully *ABC,* pp. 403f., at this point, especially the section "Teaching of chs. 11 and 12."

Reading 44: 2 Samuel 13

AMNON'S CRIME AND ABSALOM'S REVENGE

Consider Amnon's lust, his clever but dishonest friend, and his violation and rejection of Tamar. Observe that Tamar was noble before she was desolate, and that Amnon was subject to the taint of blood and to the taint of environment. What are some of the bad uses made of cleverness (v. 3)? Did David share in this crime (v. 7)? How may the evils which men do live after them? How account for Absalom's scheme for the murder of Amnon? Was this grievance enhanced by David's failure to reprove Amnon? Did his close blood relation to Tamar convey responsibility? Amnon as the oldest son stood in the way of Absalom's ambition to rule. Did this have anything to do with his murderous purpose? Fix in mind the particulars of the flight of Absalom. David's grief for Amnon grew less, and his desire for his exiled son became more intense. Why didn't David send for Absalom?

The results of David's sins showed up in the character and deeds of his children. They were the logical outcome of his policies. His lack of restraint and his self-indulgence added nothing to the moral stability of his family. His nine wives and eighteen children mentioned in the O. T. furnished a background for jealousies and quarrels. The royal household became a breeding place for factions, feuds, and family rows.

The treatment of Tamar was brutal, unrelieved save by the comfort of Abaslom, who took the heartbroken girl into his own home. To be violated and thrown "into the street" was to suffer from lust turned into hatred. David was angry, but so far as we know he did nothing to reprove or to warn the criminal. One's sympathy goes out to the dejected and desolate Tamar, but one hesitates to think that her marriage to her violator would have improved matters. Marriages which have no basis in common ideals in life and which are without real mutual respect are usually miserable and end in disaster.

Absalom laid down his plans for vengeance at the sheep-

shearing feast with great care. He himself was to give the signal and his servants were to strike down and kill. His dishonesty, pretension, and skill in secret schemes had been brought to full fruitage by his father. With the power of this example before him, supplemented by the misuse of the shrewdness of others at hand, Abasalom became an apt pupil in the school of David and Joab.

Reading 45: 2 Samuel 14

THE RECALL OF ABSALOM TO JERUSALEM

This passage is concerned with the king's consent to the return of Absalom. Through the parable enacted by the "wise" woman David was committed to a principle and then asked to apply that principle in his relations to Absalom. Do we ever consent to principles which we fail to apply to ourselves? What was the principle inherent in the parable? What are some of the conflicting loyalties of our day? Through Joab, Absalom and his family were brought back to his own home in Jerusalem. Why was Joab so interested in Absalom? The return was not a restoration to the favor of the king. Can reconciliation and pardon be genuine when they are only partial? After two years Absalom secured full recognition at the court. Was this by demand or merit? Would this restore his position as prince? Was he justified in forcing the help of Joab?

The problem of the enacted parable had to do with the conflict of loyalties. The law of blood revenge was fairly simple in its operation between families and tribes, but within the family it was not so easily applied. All members of the family were under solemn obligation to stand by one another. The blood feud might result in leaving the family without posterity. In the thinking of that day it was right for blood to be avenged. But to slay the guilty member of a family was one thing, and to blot out the whole family was much more serious. David consented to defend the cause of the widow's family as a whole by refusing to apply the law of blood revenge to the only remaining member of the family, albeit that member was a murderer within the family itself. We are faced with the same problem in our loyalties. There are times when the exposure of a member of the family would break the loyalty of the family as a whole. Strict loyalty to the state at times means disloyalty to the

interests of larger groups. Overemphasized denominational loyalties cannot be without disloyalty to the church at large. This incident offers no full solution to the problem of conflicting loyalties. It only hints that certain loyalties cannot be avoided without detriment, and that wretched consequences come from indulgence, weakness, and compromise.

With the king's consent to the principles in the parable the woman cast aside all pretense and pointed the moral at once. As Absalom was heir apparent, he in a very real sense was the son of the people. So long as Absalom was banished, he was, as it were, dead to the nation. He was a murderer just as her remaining son had been, but on him were centered the hopes of the people of God. The point of the parable was that David should protect Absalom by ordering his return, just as he had promised to protect the woman's son. That Absalom was not the only remaining son of David, not the only heir apparent, is of little significance, for this is a parable, an illustration, and not a logical argument. To the mind of the East the parable was convincing through its illustrative aspects and not through its adherence to details.

Written Work:With your own church in mind write out in full a sermon on "Conflicting Loyalties." Refer to David's problem and make it plain. Note the many different loyalties which make up our lives—home, friends, community, party, nation, humanity, the church, and God. Explain and illustrate how these loyalties may come into conflict. Make clear where our supreme loyalty lies (to God, his kingdom, his church, the spirit of Christ, the service of men, etc.)

Reading 46: 2 Samuel 15:1–18:18

ABSALOM'S REBELLION AND DEATH

The closing part of David's reign was disturbed by several rebellions. The first of these, led by his son Absalom, is recounted in what has been described as one of the most extended and vivid narratives of the O. T. The unhappy incident is given so completely that it needs but little comment for its understanding. The chief events of the story center around four points of interest: the projection of the conspiracy and rebellion; the flight of David and his group; the occupation of Jeru-

salem by Absalom and his forces; and the decisive battle at Mahanaim.

Observe the causes of this rebellion. Absalom's royal ambitions had been wounded. He resented David's indifference and neglect. By aloofness and inaction David had lost much of his hold upon his people. Absalom knew of this undercurrent of popular dissatisfaction. He was aware of his own rising favor. This was enhanced by the arts of the politician, impressing the people with his splendor and currying their favor through personal attentions. Many leading men were caught in the scheme of his intrigues. Through crafty deception he implicated the majority of the royal court in his conspiracy. He played up to the men of Hebron, his own birthplace, and took advantage of Judah's resentment over David's removal of the capital from Hebron.

Read the account of David's flight from Jerusalem (15:13–17:29). This is one of the saddest scenes of the Bible. The king, old and brokenhearted, forlorn and barefoot, trudging up the Mount of Olives, with his head covered, weeping as he goes, with his men about him weeping, presents an unforgettable picture. He reaches the top only to enter his real Gethsemane, where Shimei, disregarding his sorrowful abasement, reviles and curses him as a man of blood. But that day of gloom has its bright aspects. David's humility and greatness of soul; his moderation in refusing to allow Abishai to strike down the hostile attacker from Benjamin; the supreme devotion of his close followers; the touching loyalty of Ittai, the foreigner and newcomer; and the generosity of the aged Barzillai to the needy fugitives—all these furnish a light that does not burn out with the years. Consider also David's insight in sending back the ark and his ready resourcefulness in leaving behind Hushai to cope with forces of occupation.

Absalom and his retinue marched into Jerusalem without opposition. He took over the city and the property of his father. He was not sure what to do. The leaders disagreed. Should he pursue and attack David at once? Why did he follow the advice of Hushai?

Note the details of the decisive battle across the Jordan. Observe the source of David's supplies, the effect of the

jungles on Absalom's men, and David's orders to "deal gently" with Absalom.

One of the chief values of this story for us is the way it discloses the character and religion of David in his hour of dark distress. David's character did not break under the strain. He was ever ready in resourcefulness, capable of overlooking meanness, not given to slight offenses, not easily discouraged, and able to win the noblest and strongest of friends. David's religion was more than superstition. He could readily leave the ark behind. Not its miraculous power, but the presence and guidance of God was what counted. If God was with him, he would not need the symbol of his presence; if God was not present, the symbol would not help him. He recognized the hand of God in his calamity and humbled himself. If his cup of bitterness was from God, he would not refuse to drink it. In his distress and sore need he did not bemoan his fate nor curse God nor revile his enemy with bitterness. God was dealing with him, and he must deal with God rather than with man. "This is religion, to see behind outward circumstance the hand of God, and amid the Babel of confusing voices to hear his voice and deal directly with him" (*ABC,* p. 407*a*).

Reading 47: 2 Samuel 18:19–19:45

THE RETURN OF DAVID

Read the record of David's grief at the death of Absalom. The saddest words of the Negro courier were left for the last. The king was overwhelmed with grief. His moans in his room over the gate smothered the joys of the victory, for the soldiers recognized not a triumphant king but a father heartbroken over the misspent life of his boy. Why was David's grief so severe? Did a sense of his own failures, his parental indulgence, and his bad example enter into it? Observe the renewal of loyalty to King David. What were the causes and results of Joab's stern rebuke of David? Was Joab lacking in sympathy for David as a father? Had David violated his covenant as king? Did the interest of the people come first with the king? Note the experiences of the king at Gilgal on his return to Jerusalem. The king favored pardon for those who had taken part in the rebellion. How account for this general policy of amnesty? Was it due to the growing weakness of the

king, to his feeling that the rebellion was the outcome of his own faults in life and rule, to his genius for building personal loyalties, or to his deliberate plan for rebuilding his kingdom? Was his treatment of Shimei, Mephibosheth, and the aged Barzillai wise and right?

David's personal grief over the death of his son was heavy. He was a weak administrator in the home, an indulgent parent. His neglect and failures had brought this bitter end. Despondency was added to grief, and in his despair his own feeling came first. Joab, the self-willed and cold-blooded soldier, recognized that his returning warriors were wounded over the king's lack of appreciation for their victory. With bluntness he brought David to task, rebuking him for his disregard of the claims of the nation. The king was the servant of the people, and any further neglect of his covenant and the duties of the state would leave no supporters.

As David pulled himself together in the plan for thanking his soldiers, his old genius for creating loyalty and bringing about reconciliation began to show itself. But the unity of the country was not easy to achieve. The northern tribes were at loggerheads. The common people were vexed at the slowness of their leaders in securing peace. The tribe of Judah, which had espoused Absalom's cause, was hesitant and fearful of reprisals. But David's diplomatic skill, his clemency in granting a general pardon to all who had taken part in the rebellion, and his assurance of certain shifts in positions of leadership opened up the way for return with public approval.

David was mild beyond the manner of kings in his treatment of all the offenders in the rebellion. Toward Joab only was he severe. The old soldier had violated orders in battle and had spoken with great plainness to the king. David had power to degrade him in rank and give his post to another, but the force of such a character was not subject even to the king. David's offer of quarters and a pension to Barzillai, the desert sheik, was for services well rendered. Likewise the chief's love of the desert with its law of hospitality was true to form. Nothing could influence the sheik to leave the desert for the crowded city, yet he based the refusal of the king's offer on the ground of his age and dependence.

Reading 48: 2 Samuel 21:1-14

THE CAUSE AND CURE OF A FAMINE

The last four chapters (21-24) of the books of Samuel are an appendix. It consists of a body of extracts, lists, and poems that have been grouped together without connection. This material has to do with the reign of David, but it interrupts the story of the conflicts with which his rule closed.

Note that the famine had continued three years. This meant that God was sorely displeased. Someone had done wrong. Why was the fault assigned to the house of Saul? Would this serve David in any way? Would it remove the house of his predecessor? Observe that the cause of the famine was found in the failure to carry out blood revenge on Saul's house for his sin in killing the Gibeonites whom Joshua favored in a covenant (Josh. 9:15).

What was the suggested cure of the famine? Seven sons of Saul were hanged. Was this a belated way of complying with the law of revenge, or was it human sacrifice to avert the anger of God? Was David trying to pacify the Gibeonites or God? Or was he seeking to justify a desired act? Observe that they were hanged "unto the Lord" (v. 6*b*), and that "God was entreated for the land" (v. 14*b*). For the heroic conduct of Rizpah read vv. 10-14. How long did she protect the bodies of her sons? Why was the lack of burial for the body regarded with especial horror (see *ABC,* p. 410*a*)? What were the results of her act then and through the years?

The religious ideas brought to light by this story were cruel and primitive. The people's understanding of the harsh side of life, its bitter ills, was simple: God was displeased with man's acts and he must be appeased. Much of what they thought was needed to pacify God would not meet with sanction today. We cannot think, for instance, of God smiling on human sacrifice as a method of securing rain. But back of these cruel expressions of their religion were ideas and values which we should not miss. With them sin was a serious matter, not just a little mistake. Then, too, we are reminded that each generation has on its hands the obligations and the liabilities of the previous generation as well as its advantages. It is man, man in his sin, that needs to be reconciled with God.

The loyalty of Rizpah to her slaughtered sons was pathetic. For months she watched over their bodies, protecting them from carrion fowl and prowling beasts. Her self-effacing love for her children knew no bounds, and from her day to ours artists and poets have extolled this supreme example of a mother's love. At length the autumn rains fell and the long drought ended. With this Rizpah found the reward of her fidelity. God was appeased, and the king ordered the bones of Saul and Jonathan brought from Jabesh-gilead and given decent burial in the family sepulchre along with the seven executed sons of Saul.

Reading 49: 2 Samuel 23

DAVID AND HIS DISTINGUISHED MEN OF SERVICE

The poem in vv. 1-7 purports to be David's last words. Read this as translated in *ABC,* p. 410. It is simple but profound. How does the writer contrast the good and the bad? Observe the strength of the two figures of speech used in the contrast. Consider the force and range of the one central truth of the psalm: "It is good to be good."

Through the use of your imagination allow this scene of David and the three brave men to take place again in our day. Observe that our experience and conduct keep company with us through the years. From the stress and perils of life David looked back to the days of his childhood. Our days do not die. They come back to us, and the dearer, the truer, and the less soiled they were as we lived them, the better, the finer and fuller they will be as we live them again. Why did David pour out the water for which the men had risked their lives? Why did the men go at the risk of their lives to get David a drink of water?

David recognized the sacramental meaning of a simple deed. He would not drink the water which the men brought to him from the well at Bethlehem. He poured it out as a sacramental libation to God. For him it was the holy offering of selfless love, too precious to be used selfishly. What glories beneath life's common things! We are the common recipients of values that have come only at the peril of men's lives (see *ABC,* p. 410*b*). When we look back of the ways in which we have been served, we see all the patience and the passion, the divinity and the eternity that are hidden beneath the risk and death of daily

service. The impress of these upon our inner life and their fruit in our fellowship must not fail.

This story also holds a picture of true heroism. These men took no thought of their lives as they went in the blazing sun through enemy lines to accomplish the desire of their leader. No one sent them. No mere bravado or desire for fame impelled them. They had long since won their place. They were not seeking a reward nor aspiring to the roll of honor. Before them was a splendid errand. The urgent desire of their leader was whispered in camp. It had its appeal. There was an inner response, and the simple service of courage accomplished that which was in the eyes of the hero an undistinguished thing. The true hero is moved by self-forgetful love, not by self-regarding ambition. The truest heroisms are a part of the day's work, and also an essential part of the character of the worker. Heroism is spontaneous, but spontaneous things have long histories. They are from all of one's yesterdays.

The heroism, then, of David's men was an inward and spiritual thing. It was born of an unselfish attitude and issued from a heart full of love. Such heroism has its message for our lives. Its need is not removed from our streets and homes. Heroic hearts find heroic situations close at hand. There is room in your life and mine, and not far from either of us, for that uncalculating love that sent the men of David on an errand that all but cost them their lives. The call for the hero does not cease with the close of war. There is need of the heroic spirit in the daily life of men. So long as cities are in the grip of tyranny and selfish power, so long as men falter and fail in their struggles for the right, so long as sin puts its heavy demands upon life, there will be need of heroism—the heroism that responds to the errands at hand, that does what needs to be done in the spirit of unselfish love.

Reading 50: 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21

DAVID'S CENSUS AND HIS ALTAR OF SACRIFICE

Consider the story of the census which David ordered. Observe the belief that God moved David to do a thing and then later punished him for doing it. In Chronicles it is Satan who incites the action. Why did the people regard such a census as a sin? Was its aim military, political, or for taxation? Was this

too much of an innovation, or was it somehow thought of as impious?

Read 2 Samuel 24:10-17 for the punishment of this deed. Note the influence of the prophet in national life. The court prophet, Gad, was the herald of divine judgment. A choice of three forms of calamity was proffered. David trusted himself to the mercy of God. Observe the penitence of David and his plea for his people. How was David's confidence in God's mercy justified? Note the establishment of the commemorative altar. Visualize the meeting of the king and the farmer on that ancient wind-swept rock. Why did David refuse the threshing floor as a gift? Was the owner sincere or just being polite? What principle of worship was involved? Can there be sacrifice in accepting gifts? Can man know the worth of God without cost?

Joab protested David's procedure as dangerous, but his objections were overruled. In slightly less than ten months the job was completed. Then there came a terrible pestilence. Plagues, famines, and other kinds of calamities were thought of as punishments from God for some insult or slight. The whole incident reflects undeveloped religious ideas that stand many centuries behind our conceptions today.

But not all the thoughts in that time were harsh and crude. The people saw the mercy of God in the short duration of the pestilence. Retribution had followed with swiftness and had struck with heavy loss, but it was stopped at the very start. David was bold and haughty and determined in his way, but he was also penitent and ready to plead the cause of the people. He himself was ready to accept the blame, but in his eyes his people had done no wrong. Although he was bent on having his own way in his impious deed, he was willing and determined to set up the altar of God, which should not be without cost.

This story becomes a charter for the best known holy place in the world. The threshing floor purchased from the Hittite farmer was turned into an altar, and sacrifice was offered. Later the Temple of Solomon was built on that spot, which is marked in our time by the Mosque of Omar, better known as the Dome of the Rock. This story and others that have grown up around this site have come to be treasured by Jews, Christians, and Moslems.

V

FIRST AND SECOND KINGS

IN content the books of Kings are joined to the books of Samuel, the four books being a literary unit which presents an important period of continuous Hebrew history. First Kings takes up that history where Second Samuel left off.

The two books of Kings were originally a single volume in the Hebrew. These books present the history of Israel from the closing days of David, not far from 980 B.C., to the release of Jehoiachin from his prison in Babylon, near 560 B.C. The chief record, therefore, of the national life of the Hebrews is found in these two books.

This history is in three parts: The first part deals with the accession and reign of Solomon (1 Kings 1–11). The second part recounts the fortunes of the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah as they continued side by side until the Northern Kingdom fell before the might of Assyria (1 Kings 12–2 Kings 17). The final part records the history of the kings of Judah from the fall of Israel (722 B.C.) to the fall of Judah (586 B.C.) and the release of her captive king (2 Kings 18–25).

The writer or editor of the books of Kings produced a noble work of history. He was a person who loved his country and believed in God, a God who cared for Israel. This unknown author was no mere historian. He was really a prophet—he was sure of a righteous God and of a moral law working in history. When the king and the people were obedient and loyal they were blessed; when they failed God their ways were rough and their efforts thwarted. Others before this author had written special chapters in Israel's history—separate stories of her heroes, her kings, and her wars. This writer wanted to present the whole story, to give the connected history of the period. Drawing his material from the older sources, he furnished that history with a wide sweep of events arranged accord-

ing to a definite scheme. He believed that the law of cause and effect held in the whole of human life. He interpreted for his people their national history.

This history as completed in the final form of our books of Kings late in the sixth century B.C. is an able work, our oldest extant national history. "Considering the limitations of such a mechanical framework, the lack of training in scientific historical research, the probable chaos of sources, and the difficulty of telling two stories at once (that is, history of Israel and history of Judah), the editors of the books of Kings did a great piece of work." (Knopf, *The O. T. Speaks.*)

Reading 51: 1 Kings 1:1–2:11

SOLOMON'S ACCESSION AND DAVID'S CHARGE

Consider the plot of Adonijah for David's throne. Observe his friends and advisers and those who were left out of his plot. Why the lack of certainty as to the rightful successor of David? What was the basis of Adonijah's hope for the throne? He was the oldest surviving son of David, attractive in appearance, fond of display, and ambitious.

The law of succession had not been firmly established for the young nation with its second king. In tribal life the eldest son usually followed his father as sheik. But if a younger son possessed superior ability, he often became the ruler instead of his brother. The people had shared in the selection of their first two kings. Hence the nomination of the passing chief and the confirmation of the people were decisive elements in determining the rightful successor. Apparently David had made no public announcement of his successor.

What was Nathan's plan for the accession of Solomon? Note Nathan's shrewd promptness in rousing David to decisive action. The sanction of both David and the people was secured. What was Solomon's attitude toward his rival and his party? What were the effects of Solomon's triumph on the plotters?

That David favored Solomon as his successor was accepted by the leaders generally. Nathan, once the bold advocate of the moral law, became a mere wire-puller in support of Solomon. Once the king's choice became public and was accepted and proclaimed by the people, it became fixed and final. The conspirators recognized this, and Adonijah fled to the altar for

the protection of Jehovah. It is significant that Solomon in his hour of triumph granted full pardon to his rival.

State David's charge to Solomon. Note the full nature of the charge. How do you explain the harshness of David toward his former leaders? How harmonize his stress on loyalty to God with his counsel of vengeance on his foes?

In his charge from his deathbed David was no longer his masterful self. He was no longer the generous and patient leader as he called for the bloody death of the two men whom he had failed to execute. But the other injunction was as noble as this was vindictive. To urge that Solomon walk in the ways of the Lord so that he might inherit the divine promise of the continued rule of his house holds a philosophy of succession that merits consideration over the years.

Reading 52: I Kings 3:3-28; 4; 9:10-28; 10:1-29

SOLOMON: HIS WISDOM AND SPLENDOR

Determine Solomon's controlling interest in life. While at the chief sanctuary in Gibeon, Solomon sensed the message of God, not from a prophet, but through a dream. What did he expect from God—a task in life or individual benefits? What was his attitude toward the people and life as a whole? Did he feel responsible or did he expect to get something from them also? Just what was the real basis of Solomon's choice of an understanding heart?

The story of Solomon's reign is a mass of details rather than a connected narrative. The facts reported are too loosely arranged for a story of his life, but certain important aspects of his life and rule stand out and deserve consideration. There were two sides to Solomon, as is so often true of people. On the one side he was humble, obedient, wise, building the central sanctuary which meant so much for the later religious life, and, for these reasons, blessed of Jehovah. On the other hand, Solomon was not lacking in ambition, selfishness, self-indulgence, and conflicting loyalties.

His choice of an understanding heart to judge the people and to discern between good and evil won God's approval and in the end brought him both riches and honor. There was none like him among the kings through all the days. But with his noble choice there went an attitude which was not so noble. The key-

note of his life was personal ambition. His desire to be a good judge reflected a sense of responsibility to God and the people, but even here his passion for pre-eminence appeared. His whole attitude toward God and life was to get rather than give. Solomon stands out as a man who made use of God to obtain the good things for himself.

The incident of the two women contending over the possession of a baby is very human. What was "wisdom" as seen in this story? Was it philosophical reflection, moral virtue, or cleverness in solving a difficult problem? Observe that the wisdom of God was in Solomon "to judge the people rightly."

With tact and shrewdness Solomon penetrated the disguises of human action and gained insight into the true motives of acts. His treatment of his rival and opponents was marked with leniency, moderation, and firmness. Adonijah, Abiathar, and Shimei were spared on the condition of good behavior, but when that was violated they were meted banishment or death.

Observe Solomon's reputation as a composer of proverbs and songs. His fame for wit and brilliance was in harmony with the rest of the splendor of his court. Many of his sayings concerned plant and animal life, but we are not to think that he was silent about human affairs. We do not know the number of his utterances. We cannot tell how many, if any, of his sayings have reached our day. His reputation for wisdom was generous, and his fame has not been dimmed by the years. We know enough to recognize the primacy of his own personal ambition and to sense his insight into human affairs and his ability to touch the springs of conduct and induce men to do his bidding.

Solomon began his reign with promise. David had expelled the Philistines and brought the peoples near by into subjection. Unified Israel was the dominant power of Palestine, and her prestige had extended into all lands. The pride and loyalty of her citizenship was a legacy of great worth. But there were perils at hand, too, for Solomon. He might fail to hold the loyalty of the people. Too much tyranny might bring revolt among his subjects and imperil the unity of the nation. Any weakness within would then be the signal for the subject powers to seek freedom, if not revenge. The real question was whether Solomon could accept the opportunities of his nation and avoid the dangers.

Read 4:1-28 and observe the wide expanse of Solomon's realm and the vast increase in expenses. The staff of his court grew in number and splendor. Governors over the land were essential for taxation. Chariots and their equipment were added to the fighting forces. Political and commercial alliances increased the size and distinction of his harem. Could such an efficient machine check the tide of discontent? Would it do so by commanding fear or by inspiring affection?

Take note of Solomon's program of public works and enterprises in trade and commerce, especially his two business ventures. He entered the horse-trading business (4:26, 28; 10:28-29) and joined with Hiram of Tyre in building and operating a fleet of ships for Eastern trade (9:26-27).

How was Solomon able to finance his kingdom of splendor? Read ch. 10 as a summary of his extravagant wealth and grandeur. We know that his spending was far in excess of his income. Under pressure for cash, he had to sell to Hiram twenty cities in Galilee. His method of direct taxation, cause of bitter resentment, would hardly begin to support the splendor of his court. His operations in trade and commerce had to have some basis in exchange. Doubtless he charged all that the traffic would stand on his horses. It is fairly certain that he levied a customs tax on the caravans of trade carrying the wares from his fleet through Palestine. The copper mines in the Arabah north of the Gulf of Akaba, disclosed in the recent excavations of Nelson Glueck, supplied the raw material for his fleet. But all this meant the removal of men from home and work, and unbearable burdens of taxation. It meant the destruction of the happiness of the people. The King's mania for splendor and show was undermining the loyalty of the people.

Reading 53: 1 Kings 5–7; 2 Chronicles 2:1–5:1

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE AND ITS IMPORTANCE

To meet the demands of his growing state and enlarging court Solomon projected extensive building enterprises. The City of David was extended to include the hill to the north, which area was later named Mount Moriah. The plan called for two groups of buildings, the palace structures and the Temple.

Note the buildings for the royal residence. The palace consisted of five buildings surrounded by a courtyard and a wall.

Nearest the old city was the House of the Forest of Lebanon, with assembly rooms on the ground floor and an armory above. The Hall of Pillars came next on the north; it was a kind of waiting room for those connected with trials before the king. This was followed by the Throne Room, or Hall of Judgment, where the king delivered his decisions, received ambassadors, and entertained his royal guests. Back of this were the private apartments of the palace, sufficient in size for his many wives and concubines. Uppermost in this series and not without its special splendor was the house erected for his Egyptian princess.

Read 1 Kings 6:2-13 for the main features of the Temple building, 6:14-35 for its internal arrangements, and 7:13-51 for its furniture and equipment. Not all things about the elaborate description of the Temple are clear, but the main features no doubt were similar to structures in Phoenicia and Babylon. The whole Temple enclosure was guarded by a wall. The Temple with its porch, antechamber, and shrine, or Holy of Holies, was only about one hundred feet long by thirty feet wide. About these central rooms there were tiers of smaller rooms for various uses, such as robing rooms for priests, storage rooms, and places for safe deposit of state and Temple treasures.

Observe Solomon's preparations and contracts for the Temple and other buildings. Forced labor, burdensome taxes, and outside skill made this building program possible. Hiram of Tyre furnished both timber and talent, for which he received annually 220,000 bushels of wheat and 180,000 gallons of high-grade olive oil. But this was only a part of the labor and expense involved. Solomon sent 30,000 Israelites to cut the timber, used 80,000 workers for cutting out and shaping the stones from the limestone hills near Jerusalem, and commandeered 70,000 state slaves as human pack horses for transportation purposes. To this group he assigned 3,600 foremen, about one driver to every fifty men.

Solomon did not assign first place to worship. It took thirteen years to build his palace and only seven and a half to build the Temple. His Temple was hardly more than a royal chapel. His empire was his first concern. It was his slave, and his chief end in life was pleasure. "There is more spiritual value in analyzing Solomon's mistaken policies . . . than in gilding his reign. His very mistakes are a guide and a warning." (Knopf.)

Reading 54: 1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 5:2–7:22

DEDICATION OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

The completion of the Temple was celebrated by the king, his representatives, and the people. The occasion was made impressive by the transfer of the ark and by elaborate sacrifices.

Follow the removal of the ark from its tent in David's city to its new place in the Temple. Who led in this act, the priests or the king? What was in the ark? What characteristic of God is featured in the poem read by the king (1 Kings 8:12-13)?

With the elders of Israel as an honor guard, the priests bore the ark to its new home as the king and his nobles and a great procession of the people led the way. As the stately procession moved through the areas of the palace buildings into the Temple court many animals were sacrificed. Then, as the people stood reverently without, the ark was deposited in its resting place under the spreading wings of the cherubim. This, in their thinking, was the induction of the Lord into his house, and Solomon uttered a prayer, the opening words of which have been preserved in the poem from the book of Jashar (v. 13). The king's belief that the Lord literally lived in his Temple did not lessen his joy over an abode for his God that was both worthy and permanent. Too, he voiced the reverence and awe with which men used to approach divine mystery. Is this a reflection of the old concept of a god of darkness and storm? Even so it recognizes God's creative power and his invisible yet constant presence.

Read 1 Kings 8:14-21 for Solomon's address to the people, vv. 22-53 of the same chapter for his extended prayer of dedication, and vv. 54-66 for his benediction and the sacrifices and final festival. What was the heart of his address and the burden of this dedicatory prayer? Study carefully the comments on the prayer in *ABC* (p. 420).

This address of the king on the history of the house and his share in its completion was noble. The sentiment of his long prayer was lofty and beautiful. There is no more comprehensive prayer found in religious literature. It had its dedicatory praise and its intercessory supplications which were for all peoples and families of the earth. This prayer has had an important role in the dedication of houses of worship over the centuries. We can hardly accept this oration and prayer as having come in

their present form from the king himself. Later prophets realized the importance of this day and these words in this form may have come from them. The prayer at least shows what exalted prophetic hopes and ideals early centered about God's holy house.

Without doubt the consecration of the Temple was a supreme day in the life of Solomon. The Temple stood for the presence of the Lord and for the offering of sacrificial worship to him. Solomon had conceived this enterprise and brought it to completion. To feel that the Lord had come to dwell in the house which he had built must have filled him with joy. He must have found great satisfaction in standing at the head of his people as their royal priest, offering sacrifice and praying on their behalf, and dismissing the multitudes with his blessings. It is not surprising to learn that thereafter he offered sacrifice in the Temple three times each year, for that Temple in its unceasing service unified the people, centralized worship, and interpreted God and related him to the needs of men.

Written Work.—After a thorough study of *Reading* 54, with attention centered on the meaning of Solomon's Temple and the value of the long prayer at its dedication, write out a carefully prepared paper on one of these two subjects: "The Significance of a Temple of Worship in a Community's Life," or "The Nature and Meaning of Prayer in Worship."

Reading 55: 1 Kings 11:26-40

JEROBOAM AND HIS FLIGHT TO EGYPT

Observe Jeroboam, his work, and his promotion by the king. Why was he in Jerusalem? How did he gain the king's favor?

As the son of a widow Jeroboam was accustomed to hard work. He was of the tribe of Ephraim, which was noted for its strong love of freedom from the time of the judges. Solomon had subordinated that tribe to Judah. Jeroboam with others had been conscripted for defense work in Jerusalem. As a member of this labor group he did not slight his work. His ability and industry soon gained the attention of the king. He was advanced from the ranks and given the position of head overseer of the workers from Ephraim. This he received as an opportunity to aid his countrymen. Neither his favor with Solomon nor his promotion lessened his love of freedom. His desire for independence was inborn, and his whole career and environ-

ment had served to strengthen it. He longed for a chance to deliver his people from their heavy burdens. The duties of his new position called for justice and demanded courage. He had a full supply of both and soon gained the respect of his tribe as a leader. He used his advancement to the good of his people and not as an obligation to the will of Solomon.

Try to visualize the meeting of Ahijah and Jeroboam. Why did the prophets oppose autocracy? Were they from the working group in society? Ahijah was an enlightened religious leader from Shiloh. He opposed Solomon's extravagance, oppression, and idolatry. He felt that such evils must be stopped. He sought a leader for the job. The prophets often protested entrenched wrong and influenced others to do likewise. The prophet called the overseer aside from the crowded highway. While the two were alone out in a field the prophet dramatized his message by tearing his new garment into twelve pieces. He handed ten of these pieces to Jeroboam as he declared the message of Jehovah: "Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee" (v. 31*b*). The industrious overseer received these words with this symbolic action as a divine call to free his people from Solomon's oppressive rule. The manner and details of the attempted revolt are left in the dark, but that he undertook the difficult task is certain. When Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam he fled for his life to Egypt, where he found warm welcome from the ruling Pharaoh.

Reading 56: 1 Kings 12:1-24; 2 Chronicles 11–12

REHOBOAM AND THE DISRUPTION OF HIS KINGDOM

Why did Rehoboam go to Shechem for his coronation? Had he already been crowned in Jerusalem? Did the people still claim the right to choose their king? The North had selected David as their king and had accepted Solomon as his nominee, but this did not bind them to the Davidic dynasty for all time. They still claimed the right to accept or reject their new king. Solomon's despotic reign had not pleased them.

The Northern leaders were determined to have relief from the severe burdens of tyranny. Excessive taxation and forced labor were the grounds of complaint. They demanded that the heavy yoke of Solomon be lightened. They asked not for the removal of governmental demands but only that these be made reasonable.

Rehoboam asked for time to consider the proposition, which doubtless carried the threat of his rejection. He consulted the older men for their advice. They had experienced the failure of Solomon's methods. They thought that the king should give heed to popular complaint. "Speak kindly to them" was the voice of experience. The younger group held democratic aspirations in contempt. They had grown up in the court with its autocratic rule and excessive demands, and they advised the king to defy the people. Rehoboam disregarded the saner counsel and accepted that of his boon companions.

On the third day the new king was ready with his reply. He intended to be much more despotic than Solomon had been. The demands of the government would not be reduced. His little finger would be thicker than his father's loins. His father had used whips; he would chastise with scorpions. The answer infuriated the Northern tribesmen. They broke into open rebellion with the old war cry of Sheba. This meant that the Northern Kingdom had declared its independence of Judah.

Rehoboam sent the chief overseer of forced labor to quell the rebellion. This enraged rather than pacified the group, and they stoned their taskmaster to death. The king barely escaped the same fate by his flight to Judah. His plans to recover his lost kingdom by force failed through the dissuasion of the prophet.

At this juncture Jeroboam was called from his retirement to lead the movement. His earlier revolt against Solomon had sent him into exile, but it had popularized him as a candidate for the throne. On his arrival at Shechem he was crowned king over the ten tribes, as Ahijah had advised.

The disruption of the kingdom had been brought on by the short-sighted policy of Rehoboam. He drove the people into the arms of a new leader. Back of this was the resentment of the North over the extravagant projects of Solomon, with their excessive cost in money and men. Too, the idolatry of Solomon and his worship of foreign gods had cost him the sanction of his more religious groups. He had alienated the prophets and their adherents. The disruption had still deeper roots. The two sections, Israel and Judah, differed in their environment, their history, and their culture. With the loss of wise and able leadership, the two areas again fell apart.

Reading 57: 1 Kings 12:25–14:20

JEROBOAM AND HIS RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY

Jeroboam took steps at once to fortify his capital at Shechem. He was just as punctual in establishing official places of worship for the people of the North. He selected the renowned sanctuaries of Bethel and Dan and gave them royal support. This was a shrewd move. As royal sanctuaries Bethel and Dan soon came to be as pre-eminent in Israel's worship as was Solomon's Temple in that of Judah.

In each of these sanctuaries Jeroboam set up the image of a golden bull. These were symbols of deity in common use among a number of early agricultural peoples. They were concrete representations of Jehovah, and the king intended that they should honor Jehovah.

Other shrines than these two principal ones received generous provision. Priests from among the people were appointed to serve at the shrines. Personal fitness rather than tribal lineage was the basis of their selection. The date of the harvest festival was fixed earlier than in Judah, as was the regular custom with the Northern tribes. The king was praised in his day for his zealous efforts in matters of religion. He was a conservative in religion, not an innovater. He was giving the people what they wanted, making their own places of worship popular. He was fostering the old-time religion as they conceived it.

There are hints that the king was unable to solve completely the religious problems of his people. The prophets saw in Jeroboam's images a source of danger. Through these idolatry would be increased. The people ceased to regard the images as only symbols. This is reflected in the story of the prophet who came to Bethel and cursed the place in the presence of the king, as well as in the incident wherein Ahijah, who had been the king's right-hand man in setting up the kingdom, turned against him to curse his house.

Jeroboam hardly merits the wholesale condemnation which later writers heaped upon him, especially for his failure to favor Jerusalem as the sole altar of worship. Jeroboam was a ruler of considerable strength and was completely devoted to the welfare of his people. He deserves to be measured by standards in vogue in his own time, and not condemned by the ideals and

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practices of later generations. On this point study carefully the comments of *ABC* on ch. 14 (pp. 424*b*-25).

Reading 58: 1 Kings 14:21–15:24

JUDAH'S HALF CENTURY OF CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL

Consider the character, the ability, and the accomplishments of each of Judah's three kings for this period. Try to understand the issues before each. By what standard were these kings judged in this passage from the Bible? Does this furnish a fair estimate of their characters? What were the chief political and religious events of this half century? Throughout the half century following the disruption, the two kingdoms were at war with each other. Each was fighting for its own advantage, its expansion and security.

Note that Judah was invaded by Egypt in the fifth year of Rehoboam's rule. What was the motive of Egypt's ruler in this, and how extensive was his invasion? Was he trying to get the gold of Solomon's Temple, or was he trying to gain control of the whole of Palestine? The king of Egypt has left a record of the towns conquered in Palestine on the temple at Karnak. This includes many towns of Israel as well as Judah. Evidently he was taking advantage of the disturbed conditions to re-establish his power over the country as a whole. He had fostered the revolt through Jeroboam, but he was here fighting both kingdoms. He was concerned only with Egypt's interests.

Was Asa's political alliance a blunder? His diplomacy met the need for the moment. Syria weakened Israel to Judah's advantage. But Syria regarded Judah as her subject from this time onward, and she expected gifts accordingly. Syria also claimed a voice in the politics of both kingdoms as Assyria began her inroads to the west. Asa failed to take the long view.

The Canaanitish religion gained headway during this half century of war. Rehoboam was a weakling in both political and moral matters. He had no striking qualities of character and was lacking in convictions. But Asa did much to restore moral balance in Judah. With vigor and courage he opposed Canaanite practices, and dared to correct certain corruptions. He banished the sacred prostitutes from all sanctuaries and brought even the practices of the queen mother into public disapproval. With zeal and devotion he magnified the Temple of Solomon.

Observe the estimates put upon these kings of Judah by the biblical writers. These writers did not aim to give the full history of the period. They were careful to mention their original sources for those interested in the details of history. They singled out certain events for comments, and these had to do with the status of the worship of Jehovah at the time under consideration. If the people did not worship exclusively in the Temple at Jerusalem, they were condemned. All of Israel's kings were condemned as bad, for none of them worshiped at Jerusalem. While the kings of Judah received a more favorable estimate, all but two of these bore the discredit of "nevertheless, the high places were not taken away." The biblical writers were estimating the leaders of an earlier day by the standards of their own day—standards which were unfamiliar to those of that earlier time. We need to get back of these particular estimates of the kings and view them in the light of the political, religious, and cultural conditions under which they lived.

Reading 59: 1 Kings 15:25–16:28

ISRAEL'S HALF CENTURY OF CONFLICT WITH JUDAH

Make a list of the five kings who were on the throne during this period. What did a change of dynasty mean? Notice that the kings were from four different dynasties. What was the chief cause of this civil strife in Israel? Did the army have anything to do with the internal strife? Did the prophets have anything to do with matters of government? In your notebook list the kings of Israel and Judah for this half century and six of the most significant things accomplished in the period.

The author is really writing two histories: one of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, one of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. He continues this plan until the fall of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17). Notice how he turns from the story of Israel to that of Judah in 14:21, back to Israel in 15:25, and then to Judah again in 22:41. Watch for these changes.

Study carefully the passages that describe the changes in dynasties (15:27-29; 16:9-11; 16:18-19, 21-22). One of the factors in these internal conflicts of Israel was the army which Jeroboam had built up for his defenses. The armed forces were not always agreed, and their interests were not always

those of the people. Military force could set up its plans for a time, but other forces were at work also.

The prophets were as influential in ending dynasties as they were in setting them up. Ahijah put the thought of kingship into Jeroboam's mind, but was displeased with his rule and favored the end of his house. Likewise the prophet Jehu intervened in establishing and then bringing to an end the activities of the house of Baasha. Does this mean that the prophets were more interested in principles and conduct than they were in particular persons and their plans?

Observe Omri's new capital for Israel. The hilltop of Samaria was well chosen as the permanent seat of the nation. It was an ideal place for fortifications, and was soon surrounded with a strong wall. The foundations of the strong palace built by Omri on this hill have been uncovered through the excavations of Harvard University in recent years. Study carefully the discussion of Omri's reign in *ABC* (p. 425*b*). Why has so little come to us through the Bible from such an able ruler? Was the biblical writer's chief interest in religion? Observe the way in which Omri cemented his treaty with the king of Tyre. The first half century after Solomon's death was filled with constant hostilities between Judah and Israel. Israel also lacked internal unity. She had her frequent changes of dynasty. There were inroads from the outside. From the south Egypt was reaching forth for her lost power. On the north Assyria was ready to assert her control. In the process of events, however, it was the religious issues which became the chief matters of conflict for the next fifty years.

Reading 60: 1 Kings 16:29-34; 22:41-44; 2 Kings 8:16-18

KING AHAB AND HIS FRIENDS

The reign of Ahab yielded important results in both political and religious realms. The religious issues of the time centered around Jezebel, his wife, and are reflected in the Elijah stories (chs. 17-19). The political phases of his rule are seen in 16:29 f.; 20; 22:1-40.

Was Ahab a popular ruler? What did he accomplish for his nation? Did he maintain loyalty of worship to Jehovah? Neither the religious crisis of Ahab's day nor the evil name which his marriage to Jezebel brought him should blind us to his essential

greatness. Many of his people were loyal and felt far more kindly toward him than did the prophets who opposed him. On the whole he was Israel's ablest king. He was a broad-minded statesman and a successful warrior. As such he greatly enriched the nation's life.

Two alliances of Ahab were highly significant. His marriage with Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, sealed a compact with the Phoenicians, the leading sailors and merchants of that time. He also made an alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, which was cemented by the marriage of his daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat. Thus he achieved an era of peace and co-operation between the two Hebrew kingdoms which had been at war for fifty years. Israel's compact with the Phoenicians helped her to maintain her independence of Syria, while that with Judah secured her southern border from outside attack. This policy of conciliation was the finest of diplomacy. Israel and her neighbors could now go forward as friends. The energies of exhausting war were turned into constructive enterprises. Sheltered by these two allies, Israel, under the statesmanship of Ahab, became the center of the culture and commerce of the eastern Mediterranean.

That Ahab was successful in his effort to build his commercial empire through these friendships is shown by his ability to build his own luxurious palace of ivory and by the enormous quantity of wool which was received as tribute each year from Moab and sold to the expert weavers and dyers of Phoenicia.

If wealth and commercial prosperity were the chief ends of a nation, then Ahab would qualify as a leader of the first order. But earnest men of Israel counted ideals more precious than wealth. The enervating life of the city was breaking down the sturdy morality which the Hebrews had brought from the desert. Moral standards were lowered. Jezebel used her influence to spread the licentious worship of Phoenician Baal. Through the marriage of Athaliah, her daughter, this evil had extended to Judah. Ahab by his policy of conciliation and good will had brought on a religious crisis which stirred the prophets to demand that Baal worship be stamped out entirely.

Written Work.—Review thoroughly *Readings* 56, 58, and 59 and note the nature, the cause, the expression, and the treatment of conflicts and divisions among people. List three worthy sub-

jects for sermons on that question, cite a suitable text for each, and write out an outline for one of these sermons.

Reading 61: 1 Kings 17

ELIJAH'S BOLD ATTACK ON THE RELIGION OF BAAL

Observe that the stories of Elijah in chs. 17-19, and 21 differ greatly from the material which surrounds them. These fascinating popular stories are embedded in prosy, factual accounts of Israel's history. Biography breaks in upon the monotonous records of political affairs with dramatic incidents and situations. These all center about Elijah as the bold spokesman of Jehovah. The marvels which he accomplished are viewed through the colors of devout imagination. Warm-hearted disciples of the prophet glorified the work of their hero. The very fanaticism of the prophet invited exaggeration. But this does not rob the stories of their basis in historical fact. The clear outlines of a moral and spiritual giant show up through the wonders recounted by loyal admirers. Other leaders of that day—kings, priests, and warriors—fade into insignificance in the presence of this champion of the Lord and of the rights of man.

What was the nature of the religious conflict which Elijah faced? What values for us are in the Elijah stories? Try to visualize the scene under consideration in this chapter. What enduring idea was the prophet illustrating by its incidents?

Three ideals of religion were in conflict at the time of Ahab. At first Jehovah was the God of nomads, the wanderers of the desert. The simple nomadic religion was concerned with man's daily needs. In time the nomads settled in Canaan, which was an agricultural area. The high places and shrines with their ritual and customs were taken over by the incoming nomads. Jehovah was now the God of an agricultural people. A third religion came in when Jezebel was allowed a place for the worship of the Baal of Tyre, who was called Melkart. This Baal was the God of an artizan and commercial people. The religion of the Tyrian Baal was more ornate and sensuous than that of the agricultural Baal, as the latter was more showy and lacking in morals than was the old nomadic religion of the Hebrews.

Elijah from the border of the desert suddenly stepped forth as the prophet of the Lord and an uncompromising advocate of the nomadic ideal of religion. These stories of Elijah serve as a vivid

supplement to the less interesting accounts of the different kings. They throw light on the existing conditions and illustrate the social, religious, moral, and political ideas of the time. They offer a clear picture of the dire effects of the famine brought on by the lack of rainfall. They also indicate what the people of that day believed a prophet could do.

At the beginning of a dreadful famine Elijah burst forth from the desert into the presence of Ahab to declare that the famine would be of long duration and that it was the judgment of God against Baal worship. Elijah considered the famine of religion more grievous than the famine of bread. Those loyal to the God of Israel were in despair. But the people need not be hopeless, said Elijah, for Jehovah was in supreme control even of the powers of nature. He, and not the Canaanite or Tyrian Baals, was the sole director of nature. He furnished his prophet with food and supplied the foreign widow with unfailing sustenance and comfort. Study carefully the comments on this chapter in *ABC* (p. 426). Note also Jesus' commendation of Elijah's kindness and breadth of vision in ministering to the foreigner in this incident (Lk. 4:25-26).

Reading 62: 1 Kings 18

THE CONTEST OF MOUNT CARMEL

This dramatic story comes from near the time of the events which it records. People of Elijah's time believed all things were possible to a prophet of the Lord. Whatever we may think of the wonders of this account, Elijah's strong support of the pure nomadic ideals of the worship of Jehovah as against the practices of the agricultural and commercial Baals is genuine history.

Observe the exaltation of the prophet's spirit. He dared defy the court and all its favorites. He did not hesitate to oppose the king, the queen, and the host of the prophets of Baal. As Ahab searched for Elijah, Jezebel was busy tearing down the altars of Jehovah and killing his prophets who were unable to hide. Note the deed of Obadiah, the steward of the palace. This layman was not less courageous than the prophets. In the fiercest of persecution he risked his life for the prophets. His convictions were above price, and not controlled by threats and dangers.

What was the real point at issue in the test on Carmel? What were the terms of the test and what were its results? If you can

visualize this scene on Mount Carmel, the story is its own best explanation. It is brilliantly expressed in simple language. Note the sharp dialogue, tense drama, and able use of taunts by Elijah in his mockery of the prophets of Baal. The proposed test was to determine the true God, who deserved the undivided allegiance of the nation. Elijah urged the people to single choice and whole-hearted devotion. They were to worship the one or the other. There could be no divided loyalty. Power to break the drought was to determine the superior, the true God. In this popular story Jehovah's victory over Baal was complete. He demonstrated that he could come to the help of his people in the cultivated land as well as in the desert. He, and not Baal, had control over the rain. He was the God of nature and the real source of fruitfulness.

Reading 63: 1 Kings 19:1-18

ELIJAH'S DESPONDENCY

Elijah's victory at Mount Carmel was soon followed by disappointment. Elijah, like many people, was subject to moods in his religion. His high confidence gave way to depression.

Why didn't Jezebel kill Elijah instead of threatening him? Why did courageous Elijah flee from danger? Jezebel's threat came at exactly the right time. Elijah was tired and depressed. He had finished a job and was without work. His high exaltation was gone and he was all but overcome with loneliness.

To what three places did Elijah go in his flight? What was the meaning of the revelation at Horeb? How did the prophet overcome his despair? At the famous sanctuary of Beersheba, Elijah was out of Israel and in Judean territory. He was safe from the queen's anger, but as a true nomad he pushed on into the solitary desert. Victory had turned into dismal failure. He lost confidence in himself and his mission and longed for death. Cheerless and exhausted, he sat down in the shade of broom brush in the desert waste. Soon he was fast asleep. After rest he awoke to partake of food and drink, only to fall asleep again. After he had refreshed himself a second time, he moved on to Horeb, where he felt closer to his God than anywhere else.

With his physical wants satisfied, the prophet was at the door of a great spiritual experience which would renew his hope and inspire his confidence. Wind and earthquake and fire, symbols

of his stormy world, were not the full expression of God. These passed on, even as Israel's social structure and Canaanite civilization must pass in the end. But God was in the gentle whisper, the silence and simplicity of the desert. Read *ABC*, pp. 426*b*-27, on the meaning of this experience.

The effect of this experience on the prophet was evident. He was assured that there were thousands of others who were loyal to Jehovah. He was not alone. Before him was a task. He was to anoint new kings over Syria and Israel and find his own prophetic successor. It was a bloody program of assassination, revolution, and war; his mission was to carry out the vengeance of his God. This passage makes plain to us once more how imperfectly even the noblest prophets of that time understood the purpose and method of God. But it also reveals some of the finer insights current in that day.

Written Work.—Prepare a sermon for the discouraged and despondent people of your community. Would these be the sick, the poor, the aged, the overworked, those whose plans have failed, the strangers, or others? After due study of this *Reading* with the aid of all helps at hand, outline and write out a brief sermon on "Our Assurances," or "Sources of Strength and Comfort," or a similar subject of your own choosing.

Reading 64: 1 Kings 21

NABOTH AND HIS VINEYARD

This story is too plain to require much comment. It does more than portray the weakness of Ahab and the wickedness of Jezebel. It reflects Elijah's conception of justice, which was binding on peasant and king alike.

How did Jezebel's view of the ownership of land differ from that of Naboth? Does the possession of private property conflict with social welfare? Is the consent of the governed essential in government? Was Elijah fair to Ahab in condemning him as a murderer and thief? Was Ahab's penitence genuine? Is truth necessary for conviction? Observe that falsehood secured the death of Naboth, but that Ahab could not endure the light of truth.

Ahab's desire for a garden was natural, but his method of getting one was illegal and unjust. It violated the rights of the common man.

Naboth was no churl in refusing to sell his land. His sense of manly independence was strong. He was a Hebrew of the old school and loved his land. He held it in trust. He had received it from his fathers and he would pass it on to his children. He was under obligation not to squander his heritage, for that would be to cheat his descendants. He must not rob the future even to gratify the king.

Jezebel had grown up in a commercial community. Her people sailed the sea and lacked devotion to particular spots. Everything was bought and sold. She was familiar with the trickery of trade. She was free to dispatch orders under false seal and trump up charges for gain. She had power and was not to be restrained by a peasant.

Ahab was under the influence of Jezebel. He was a valiant warrior. To have his wishes disregarded was bitter and painful. Naboth's refusal to part with his land threw him into a sulking mood. Like a naughty child, he refused to eat. But under the scorn of the queen, and through the outrage which she planned and executed, he was moved to ride with his captains to inspect his new vineyard.

But a greater power than Jezebel was at hand. Elijah was a prophet of a religion that cared. There were cause-and-effect relations in life. What people did was a factor in their own destiny. God was ethical and was concerned about the moral conduct of his people. Just as Mount Carmel lifted Jehovah into supremacy over the Baals, so Elijah in Naboth's vineyard linked his God with social justice. He reaffirmed with enduring strength the ethical and democratic nature of Israel's religion.

Reading 65: 1 Kings 20

AHAB AND HIS FOES

In many ways Ahab was a strong ruler. His shrewdness in diplomacy, his energy in trade, his sense of justice, his breadth of vision, his decision of character, and his courage and ability in fighting served him well. He was selfish and concerned with political and material affairs, but he was never a coward.

His severest tests of courage came in the wars with Syria. What was the cause of his first war with Syria? What was his standing with Syria prior to the battles of Samaria and Aphek? What were the demands of Benhadad, and what was

Ahab's terse ultimatum? What did the prophet have to do with these battles (vv. 13, 22, 28)?

Ahab was under the Syrian yoke the greater part of his reign. His father had yielded certain streets in Samaria for the Syrian merchants and had given Benhadad a number of cities of northern Israel. He was obliged to pay tribute also.

But Benhadad forced a new issue with his insolent demand for freedom to plunder Samaria with his soldiers. Ahab, advised by his elders and encouraged by the unnamed prophet, courteously refused this. Such a demand was unreasonable and moved Ahab to remind Benhadad that the close rather than the beginning of battles was the time to proclaim victories. The disorderly flight of the panic-stricken soldiers of Syria gave point to Ahab's proverb.

What religious explanation did the Syrians give of their defeat? What were the results of the battle in the plain the following spring? Why was Ahab so lenient in his treaty with Syria after the notable defeat at Aphek? Did this leniency show statesmanship, or was Ahab just looking after selfish interest? What reputation did the kings of Israel have? Were they soft, or were they considerate? How did the prophets regard this policy of conciliation?

Ahab's real reason for treating his foe with consideration was the rising might of Assyria. The west was endangered by this threat of invasion. Assyria was the enemy of all, and their only hope of safety lay in their united efforts. Harsh terms of treaties gave way to peaceful leagues and the consideration of common interests.

Reading 66: 1 Kings 22:1-40

BATTLE OF RAMOTH-GILEAD AND THE PROPHET MICAIAH

We know from outside sources that Ahab was at the battle of Karkar against the Assyrian king. Although that king claimed victory, he made a speedy retreat home. This released the numerous western nations from the fear of conquest. With this security they were soon back in the turmoil of their own local bickerings. Benhadad had not complied with the treaty of Aphek. Three years had passed and Ramoth had not been turned over to Ahab as the treaty provided. Ahab decided that it was time for settlement. He sought an alliance with Judah,

whose king was ready with wholehearted support. How account for this friendliness of the two nations? Was its cause political or religious?

The half century of conflict following the separation of the two nations had ceased. New issues were up for consideration. There were adherents to Baalism in both kingdoms, just as there were loyal supporters of Jehovah in both nations. The conflict in religion was not limited by national lines. The daughter of the king of the North had married the son of the king of the South. The king of Syria was demanding in his relations to both Israel and Judah. Ahab and Jehoshaphat were subject to the same oppression.

Why did the kings seek the view of the prophets on their plan of war? How did the prophets differ in their views? What happened to the minority group? What was the ultimate outcome of this conflict? Why did Ahab disguise himself in the battle? Consider the comments of *ABC* (p. 428*b*) on Micaiah, the son of Imlah. Were the prophets who supported the king and his plans as sincere as Micaiah? Note the latter's insight, conviction, devotion, and courage. He placed the will of God above the agreed opinions of men. "What Jehovah says to me, that will I speak." Without insight and courage there can be no worthy prophet. Without insight the prophet has no message, and without courage his message has no expression. Ridicule, persecution, insult, and imprisonment are no light matter, but only truth and loyalty bring absolute obligation. Micaiah was in jail on a prison diet by orders of Ahab, but Micaiah's message remained with the king as he cautiously went to battle disguised as a common soldier.

Ahab died as a brave soldier. He was a great statesman through a stormy period of his nation's history. But he passed from his leadership without fully realizing that a nation needs pure religion and democracy as much as material prosperity.

Reading 67: 2 Kings 2

ELISHA AND THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS

The stories of Elisha are placed in the time of Jehoram of Israel, whose reign followed the brief rule of his ill-fated brother soon after the death of Ahab his father. These Elisha stories are found in 2 Kings 2:1–8:15; 13:14-21. They center

about the prophet and his work. The spirit and style of these stories, like those of Elijah, differ greatly from the material in which they are embedded. Read these stories as a whole and observe their nature and content. They seem to be arranged topically. It is not possible to secure from them the order of the events in the life of Elisha, who was active during the reign of four kings of Israel.

Who were the "sons of the prophets"? What was the manner of their life? What was the main purpose of their efforts as guided by Elisha?

Elisha went with Elijah on his last round to the prophetic groups at Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. These were communities of religious enthusiasts which had grown up around these old sanctuaries. The members of these places felt that Elijah's work was about over and that Elisha would be his successor. These guilds, which had started back in the days of Samuel, wished to preserve without change the simple nomadic religion of Jehovah. This desire led them to oppose all the influences of Canaanite civilization. By Elisha's time their one purpose was to overthrow the dynasty of Ahab and the tyranny of Baalism which he had fostered. They were intense in their opposition to luxury and all kinds of corruption.

What did Elisha mean when he requested a double share of Elijah's spirit? Did Elisha wish to be twice as great as his master, or was that his way of saying that he wanted to be worthy to succeed Elijah? Note the striking figure of v. 12. Elisha counted Elijah a stronger defense for his country than an army with its soldiers and chariots.

Why did a group of the prophets want to search for Elijah before giving allegiance to Elisha? The prophetic act of Elisha in calling down a curse on the lads at Bethel served to strengthen the popular belief in the power of God and to stress God's protective care over his prophet. Here is a clear illustration of how far the moral ideals of this time fell below those of the N.T. Compare this act of the prophet in putting a curse on these boys because they ridiculed him with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and especially with Jesus' humility and patient suffering and love for his foes. Observe the comments of

ABC, p. 429, on the ideas of the early times reflected in this chapter.

Reading 68: 2 Kings 4:8-37; 8:1-6

ELISHA AND THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

As you read this beautiful story of the Shunammite woman try to grasp its rich insights into life. Do not let the son's restoration to life be the extent of your interest. Note the regular journeys of Elisha in his ministries, the unfailing kindness of the Shunammite home to this prophet, the guest room on the roof of the house, its equipment and its use, the refusal of the reward of official favors for kindness rendered, the appreciation for services received, the woman craving for motherhood and for offspring, the genuine concern of the people for this true prophet of God, and the meaning of his presence to them.

Of what value would have been Elisha's commendation of the Shunammite woman to the king or to the commander of the army? Do people still take advantage of those suffering from calamity? What induced the strangers to seize illegally the property of the family in its absence during the famine? How is our treatment of others affected by personal acquaintance with them and a real understanding of their rights and needs?

This story gives a very human picture of Elisha and shows what the people of his own day thought of him as the prophet of God. They believed that he maintained a close fellowship with God, understood his purposes, and had great influence with him. Elisha lived among the people. They knew where he lived and how to reach him. They went to him for help in the troubles common to their daily life. The thread of human helpfulness runs through this whole story. "Nothing indeed shows more clearly what Elisha could be to people than the whole narrative of his dealings with the Shunammite. Here we see him stopping as familiar yet revered guest in a home, enjoying the chamber reserved for his comfort, seeking how he might repay this gracious hospitality, taking an interest in the family, obtaining for them what they most desired, succoring them in trouble, advising them to move before famine came, and in general showing himself their friend." (James, *op. cit.*)

Reading 69: 2 Kings 5:1-19

THE CONVERSION OF A SYRIAN GENERAL

The story of Naaman the Syrian general is another favorite. Of all the Elisha stories it is the one that ranks highest in artistic and literary merit. Its incidents follow each other rapidly, with graphic dialogue. Note the capture of the little Hebrew girl, her service as maid to the general's wife, her concern over her master's illness, her high regard for Elisha, Naaman's delivery of the royal letter to the king of Israel, Elisha's helpful deeds of service to all concerned, the pride of the general, and his ultimate declaration of faith in Jehovah.

What is the chief point of emphasis in this incident? Is the healing of the disease as important as the conversion of the Syrian general? What influences accomplished his conversion? Did the little girl, the kings, the prophet, the general himself, his servants, and Jehovah each have part in the process?

The term translated "leprosy" is a general one. With the Hebrew this included many skin diseases besides actual leprosy, which was incurable until recent times. Some of the cases of "leprosy" in that day yielded to treatment, while others disappeared without treatment (Lev. 14:3).

What do you think of the simple acts of life in both health and religion? Can there be either robust health or vital religion without attention to many minor matters that seem to have little significance? Observe that due regard for the simple, common, recurring incidents of life is of great value. Neglect of little matters, failure to heed elementary counsel, may rob us of fullness in health, religion, and life.

Were national hatreds and prejudices current in that day? Do not fail to observe that Israel's God was accepted by a Syrian general. There was something in Israel's religion for the whole world. But in that day men had not come to the high faith in one God who was Lord of all things and all nations. They thought of each people as having its own God to whom it should be loyal. In a given land only the God of that land was to be worshiped, nor could his people worship him except on his own soil or in his own territory. Recall David's words in 1 Sam. 26:19. He thought that when his enemies drove him out of the country it meant that he must serve other gods. It was

something notable then when this Syrian general declared his faith in the God of Israel and wanted henceforth to worship him alone. Yet even he thought he must have some earth taken from Palestine so that he could stand on this soil when he worshiped Jehovah in Damascus. (See *ABC*, p. 430*b*.)

Written Work.—Write a paper of five hundred words or more on "The General's Conversion." Tell the story briefly in your own words. Consider what led to his conversion. Note the part played by the maid, by Elisha. Then point out what this story might mean for us as to personal evangelism by pastors and people, alike as to spirit and method. If you wish, put this in the form of a sermon.

Reading 70: 2 Kings 5:20-27; 7:3-15

GEHAZI'S GREED AND THE LEPERS OF SAMARIA

This *Reading* brings us two of the Elisha stories. They are brief and unrelated to each other. Both stories reveal unworthy ideas and improper practices, but each suggests a principle of right conduct.

Elisha's refusal of Naaman's gift opened the way for the avarice of Gehazi (5:20-27). His greedy eyes could not endure the sight of the wealth his master had rejected. He would take advantage of another's kind deed; he would use it for personal profit. He decided "to run after him, and take somewhat of him" (5:20*b*).

Observe Gehazi's clever ruse and its results. Would this destroy Elisha's emphasis on the unpurchased blessings of God? What did Elisha mean by "Is it a time to receive money?" (5:26). Did he imply that it was proper to testify to the character of Israel's God? The falsehood of Gehazi failed to serve him. Even his secret purposes were discerned. Evasions and polite sophistries cannot endure close inspection. What ethical implications has this story for our day?

The story of the four wretched lepers of Samaria (7:3-15) is "a great but little-used passage." This story has its cruder aspects. Some of the things which the lepers did are not commendable by the standards of our time. One thing, however, should not be overlooked. These lepers in their unexpected plenty took thought of their people back in Samaria who were desperate under famine and siege. At the risk of life they made

their way through the night to communicate the good news and share their good fortune. They had made a great discovery, and this was not for themselves alone. This phase of the story reflects the principle of obligation, the application of which demands the expansion of our social and missionary services to all mankind.

Reading 71: 2 Kings 8:7-15; 9

ELISHA AND POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Elisha was very human. He frequented the cities and homes of his people. He was constantly active, appearing in Israel, Judah, Moab, Phoenicia, and Damascus. He was the friend and helper of all kinds of people. The rank and file of the people about him knew of his good will. Kings at home and abroad sent for him and consulted him on important matters.

Elisha was more than a wonder-worker. He was deeply concerned with political affairs. He planned and worked to overthrow the house of Ahab. This dynasty had fostered Baalism and sanctioned the tyranny by which it spread. For years Elisha was the moving spirit among the prophets of Israel, who were cultivating the seeds of revolution planted by Elijah. As a worthy leader Elisha got things ready before he acted. He was a keen observer and knew all the existing conditions. He knew when the time was ripe for action.

Why and how did Elisha secure the throne of Syria for Hazael (8:7-15)? Without doubt Hazael was influenced by Elisha to murder Benhadad for his throne. He must have thought that this would further his desire to overthrow the house of Ahab. However, the forebodings of Elisha proved true, for Hazael showed himself the enemy of the Hebrew people, bringing them to the very verge of annihilation.

How did Jehu become king of Israel? What did Elisha have to do with this? How long had he worked to bring it about?

Jehu was a dashing young officer. He was both able and aggressive. Elisha took time to get the army back of his plot as well as to make sure of his leader. Observe that the army leaders were ready to hail Jehu as king. Why were the kings of Judah and Israel at Jezreel? Why did Jehu give orders for no one to leave Ramoth? Was Jezebel aware of the fate awaiting her? How did she face it, boldly or as a coward?

With her doom certain, Jezebel determined to die as a queen. Dressed in her full robes of state, as if for a gala occasion, she appeared at the window as Jehu drove into the palace court. As he entered the gate she greeted him with the stinging reproach "You Zimri," which put him in the class of a well-known assassin, another hated general who had murdered his king. Jehu replied by ordering the eunuchs to throw her from the window to the street. As her body struck the stones it was mangled by the hoofs of the horses and wheels of the chariots. Jehu trod over the corpse into the banquet hall of the palace. As he feasted, the street dogs devoured the flesh of the queen's body beside the palace.

This was a horrible way to die for one who was the daughter of a king, the wife of a king, and the mother of kings. She had brought disaster upon her nation, upon her family, and upon herself. The prophet and his followers and the general who carried out this terrible action viewed it as the judgment of God on the queen's evil deeds. We need to recognize, however, that most of the deeds of Jezebel were the result of her sincere religious beliefs. She felt impelled to further the interests of the Baal worship in which she had been brought up. Her sincerity and loyalty and the queenly courage with which she faced the inevitable end merit our reluctant admiration.

Reading 72: 2 Kings 10:15-36

JEHU'S RELIGIOUS REFORMS

"Zeal for the Lord" does not always make for righteousness. Jehonadab, the founder of the Rechabites, was exacting in his demands and obedient in his religion. He hated Baalism above everything. He refused to have anything to do with the civilization of Canaan. The Rechabites abstained from drinking wine, from engaging in farming, from living in stone houses, and from the other customs of current civilization. They were wedded to the simple practices of the nomads. They were bent on maintaining desert ways as new and more complex conditions arose. They were more concerned for customs and external practices than for principles of conduct and the demands of justice. In like manner Jehu insisted on a certain type of worship. He cared little for what happened to the state and nation provided this kind of religion prevailed. He was intense against

Baal worship and uncompromising in his demands for the worship of Jehovah in the manner which he as king had ordered. After murdering everybody in Jezreel who had any connection by blood or friendship or position with the house of Ahab, Jehu, with Jehonadab as his companion, drove furiously into Samaria and began his carnival of blood.

But Jehu's master stroke was against the worshipers of Baal. He would uproot that religion by one mighty effort. He would do by stratagem that which Elijah and Elisha had failed to accomplish with force and diplomacy. He pretended that he had gone over to the side of the Baal. He called for a great sacrificial service in the Baal temple at Samaria. The priests and worshipers crowded the temple to the very doors. When the service was well under way, Jehu gave the signal to the guards with whom he had made previous arrangements; the soldiers rushed in to kill the helpless crowd, and not a person escaped.

For the time Jehu put an end to the worship of Baal in Israel. The temple in Samaria was razed to the ground. The sacred images of the Baal were broken and burned. The very spot was desecrated beyond any further use for religious purposes. But deeds of violence do not change evil ways into good behavior. The royal house of Ahab had been exterminated, but by an unrestrained passion that laid the country open to a hatred and tyranny more severe than that which was removed. Religion has to do with character and conduct, with life and human relations, and not just a form of worship. People are not made good by the lash or through persecution. Religion is not extended by the sword. It is clasped hands, not crushed heads, that disclose the relationship essential to living together.

Note the two views expressed in the Bible concerning Jehu's deeds. Some of the biblical writers considered that, because he allowed four of the descendants of Jehu to rule as kings over Israel after the close of his reign, God was pleased with Jehu's reforming zeal and acts of cruelty. However, Israel met with certain reverses. Hazael of Syria defeated Jehu of Israel (vv. 32-33). For these same writers this meant that God was displeased with Jehu because he had stopped short of a complete religious house cleaning: he had not removed the Baal influences from Jeroboam's altars at Bethel and Dan. But later Israel's great prophetic teachers reversed the interpretation of these

writers. Hosea (1:4) viewed the whole bloody affair of Jehu with horror. It failed to have God's sanction, and the prophet boldly declared that the house of Jehu would end and the whole nation would suffer because of the evil deeds of her king.

Reading 73: 2 Kings 11; 2 Chronicles 22:10–23:21

THE CHARACTER AND FATE OF ATHALIAH

The fury of Jehu disturbed Judah also. Her king Ahaziah and forty-two other members of the royal family had been killed. This called for new leaders. Who would determine these? Did Jehu have the power to enforce his desires in this matter? Royal lineage also counted in Judah. Never before had her rightful heir failed to inherit his throne.

But Athaliah became the controlling power. In honor and authority she stood next to the king. She was the daughter of a king, the wife of a king, the mother of a king, and on the verge of becoming the ruling queen. Like Jezebel, her mother, she was devoted to Baal; and she knew how to get what she wanted. On hearing of the king's death she acted quickly. Her influence and her life were in danger. Under a new king she would probably lose both. Before anyone was aware of her plans, she put to death her relatives of the royal stock (v. 1) who had escaped Jehu's cruelties and took the throne, unopposed, for herself.

Once Athaliah was in control it was difficult to break her power. She was supported by a strong bodyguard of foreign soldiers. Under royal support the Baal party directed the matters of state, while the religion of Jehovah took refuge in the Temple.

But a day of reckoning was ahead. Ideals cannot be suppressed by tyranny. Athaliah's quick wit had been surpassed by that of another woman. Jehosheba, sister of the dead king and wife of the chief priest Jehoiada, had rescued Joash, the year-old son of Ahaziah, while Athaliah's massacre was under way. The young prince was carefully concealed in the priestly apartments in the temple for six years. During this time the priests under the guidance of Jehoiada carried on their agitation against the tyrannical Baal party in power.

Jehoiada's program against Athaliah was well planned. It was

carried out to the letter by all groups. Everything was in readiness. The common people were eager for a change in government. The Jerusalem priesthood had taken up the watchword of Elijah against Baal. The royal guards were on the side of the priests. The palace officials were loyal to the descendants of David. Jehoiada considered it unsafe to delay action any longer. The young prince was crowned king in dramatic fashion, as the exultant soldiers shouted, "Long live the king!" On hearing this, Athaliah came from her apartments in the palace to the Temple to shout forth her cry of treason. But no one cared enough for her to take her part. The soldiers led forth the unprincipled tyrant that they might slay her outside the sacred precincts.

The queen's death was followed by a thorough house cleaning. The people renewed their loyalty to Jehovah as their only God. They pledged their support to the democratic rule about to be set up. They rushed to the temple of Baal and smashed to bits the temple, altars, and images. The massacre led by Athaliah six years before was now reversed. Her arbitrary government and degenerate religion were submerged. The better elements of the population rejoiced in the triumph of the religion of Jehovah. There had been bitter years of struggle and bloodshed, but the political and religious ideals of the prophets were now in control.

Reading 74: 2 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 24

THE REIGN OF JOASH OVER JUDAH

The young king Joash took a great interest in the sanctuary of worship. The chief event recorded of his reign has to do with the repair and improvement of the Temple. With Jehoiada the priest as his guardian the king would be familiar with religion and with the depleted condition of the chief shrine of the people. He considered the house of worship worthy and its repair essential.

People do not always keep the house of the Lord in repair. It is so easy to neglect those duties which are common to all. We are prone to postpone tasks to a more convenient time. We are quick to remember any share we have had in the expense of past improvements, and find it easy to put personal needs

first. But without repair the Temple perishes, worship itself is imperiled, and our own lives impoverished.

Joash found the priests of his day quite ready to profit from the income of Solomon's Temple, but not so ready to share in the expense of maintaining that sanctuary. At first the Temple was largely a royal chapel. Solomon projected its building. As king he received all revenues and paid all expenses. The support of the priests and the repairs of the building were his obligation. But the Temple grew in importance. It ceased to be a royal chapel and became national in character. It developed into a popular shrine. Its upkeep shifted from the king to the public. As the priests became the servants of all, they insisted that the Temple dues belonged to them by right. With this vested interest in worship the priests became a close and powerful corporation. By the time of Joash their claims were generally accepted as just. He too was ready to sanction the custom of allowing all fines and dues collected in the Temple to go to the priests, provided they would agree to keep the building in repair.

The priests, however, failed to abide by their contract. They received without giving. Twenty years passed and the Temple was falling to pieces. The king's patience was at an end. He arranged a new system with definite regulations. Certain classes of income were to go to the priests for their own use, and all other contributions would become a maintenance fund, to be administered by laymen. From time to time these laymen would take the money from the chest at the entrance of the Temple to pay for the labor and materials used in repairs. An adequate fund for the support of able leaders and worthy places of worship is of primary importance, and so are strict honesty and wisdom in the proper use of funds directed to these ends. The priests were slack and unreliable in the business matters committed to their keeping. The laymen were conscientious and faithful in their work and in their lives. They were unselfish and honest in the use of the fund at their disposal.

Reading 75: 2 Kings 13

ISRAEL'S SUBJECTION AND RECOVERY

Jehu's evil lived after him. His acts brought disaster to the reign of his son Jehoahaz. Hazael of Syria, whom Jehu had made

angry, took to the war path. His cruelties knew no limit. For a quarter of a century he pillaged at will after he had halted Assyria at tremendous cost. In making good these losses at Israel's expense he reduced Jehoahaz to straits. He left him only a few square miles of territory around Samaria and almost destroyed his army (vv. 3, 7). Israel's power as a nation was gone. Her military might could not exceed fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand infantrymen. Her strength continued to wane. Not even the new king could prevent his country's humiliation.

At first Jehoash was under the beck and nod of Syria, as had been his father. But in time "the Lord was gracious unto" the Israelites (v. 23). He gave them "a savior, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians" (v. 5). Who was this "saviour"? What relief did he bring to the nation?

It was Israel's release from the power of Syria that saved her from ruin. More than one factor contributed to this deliverance. The death of Syria's able king caused confusion. Benhadad the new king was a much weaker ruler than Hazael. A rival kingdom to the north had humbled Syria's pride. In his western expedition the king of Assyria had secured an enormous tribute from Damascus. This permanently crippled Syria and left Jehoash free to settle old scores with her. With her paralyzing fear of Syria removed, Israel now entered upon a new day of expansion. The tide of her fortune changed. Her captured cities were recovered, and she stood before the open door of prosperity.

But that better day did not come as rapidly as the great prophet desired. Elisha from his deathbed blamed Jehoash in part for this delay. The king's indecision of character and lack of confidence in God prevented complete victory. He lacked "grit and determination in the struggle for freedom." He smote the ground only three times when he should have smitten it five or six times.

Give due consideration to the last message of Elisha (vv. 14-21). Why did the king visit the sick prophet? How did he express his grief and admiration? Would the country suffer from the death of the aged prophet?

The prophet had been loyal to the king and to his country

in every way. He had played a great part in her struggle for freedom. His spirit had been her best defense. The king was losing a staunch friend in the death of the prophet. The nation was suffering a blow equal to the loss of its army. "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof" were not just words to the king. This was more than the quotation of Elisha's former utterance on Elijah; it was the king's interpretation of Elisha's service to his country. He had been more to Israel than her chariots and horsemen.

We should not miss the note of cheer in this last message of the prophet. His times were disturbed and troubled, but the arrow of the Lord's victory was not lacking. Through this symbolic act the brave prophet expressed his undying faith in the triumph of his God and the deliverance of his people.

Written Work.—Prepare a paper on Elisha. Describe his character, his influence, his achievements after reading over again carefully all the passages which bear on this theme.

Reading 76: 2 Kings 14:1-22; 2 Chronicles 25:1-25

AMAZIAH AND HIS FOLLY

Amaziah's reign opened with promise but ended in disaster. The new king was diplomatic with his own people. He was lenient with those who had conspired against his father, even sparing the children of those guilty of his murder (v. 6). Does this indicate an advance in the moral sentiment of the community and in the king's recognition of individual responsibility?

Do conceit, brusque methods, insulting replies, suppression of requests, and selfish prosperity foster war? What difficulties were settled by this clash of the two kingdoms?

It is not clear whether Amaziah challenged the king of Israel to a contest or called for a friendly conference with him. "Come, let us look one another in the face" (2 Kings 14:8) may be a request for a conference as equals on certain matters in dispute. Both kings were proud of their recent victories and their increasing prosperity. Amaziah did not wish to be in vassalage to Israel. He proposed a conference to Jehoash for the consideration of this matter. As Israel was three times as large as Judah, Jehoash treated this message with disdain. He couched his insulting reply in the fable of the thistle and the

cedar, advising the king to rest on his laurels and nurse his vanity at home. But Amaziah in his success and conceit refused this sound advice. He preferred the test of strength in battle. Instead of a conference there was war's crushing defeat at Bethshemesh. Amaziah was captured, Jerusalem's defenses were broken, the palace was plundered and the Temple looted. Hostages were demanded to insure the peace of the future, as the kingdom of Judah became the vassal state of Israel. Freedom from outside pressure and conflicts had left the two kingdoms to their own devices. Their "brotherly squabbling" broke their friendly relations, plunged them into strife, left their difficulties unsettled, and imperiled the security of their people.

Reading 77: 2 Kings 14:23–15:7; 2 Chronicles 26:1-23

UZZIAH OF JUDAH AND JEROBOAM II OF ISRAEL

A popular revolt against Amaziah put Uzziah (Azariah) on the throne of Judah. Conditions at that time were favorable to both political and economic success. His nation was free from outward dangers. Assyria with her own home troubles was inactive in the west. Damascus was still weak. The ruling dynasty of Egypt was tottering. Political calm prevailed at home and abroad. The young king proved himself an able and practical ruler. Without challenging the overlordship of Israel he extended the boundaries of his domain in every direction, reorganized his government, strengthened his defenses, gave attention to the routes of trade and set up protections for commerce, promoted agriculture and cattle raising, and encouraged all kinds of business and building enterprises. Under his extended rule Judah became powerful and wealthy.

Israel, too, profited from Assyria's inactivity. Jeroboam took advantage of the opportunity to extend his control over the realm that David had ruled. He is little more than mentioned by the historian in the books of Kings, but we know that his reign was long and brilliant. He really put his country on the map again. He brought to her great military and commercial prosperity. His reign almost paralleled that of Uzziah over Judah. For a whole generation the Hebrews of both kingdoms lived in an Indian summer of luxury and ease.

We learn, however, from the eighth-century prophets that the seeds of death were beneath the surface of this half century of ease and wealth. This was a time of social ferment and religious festivals. The Hebrews were no longer simple shepherds and farmers. The development of the resources of the country, the spoils of conquest, and the rich products of trade had brought about a change. Cities had taken the place of villages, and rich nobles and powerful classes had established their homes there. The great middle class was banished—killed off by war or reduced to serfdom. The poor became the victims of greed and injustice. A commercial civilization came in, and exploitation and enslavement were its legalized practices.

The religious festivals failed to improve matters. The demands of ritual were met, but this merely confirmed the people in their sense of the Lord's favor and protection. Their sacrifices were abundant, but their sanctuaries were cursed with robbery, oppression, gluttony, drunkenness, and immorality.

Amos and Hosea saw beneath these unwholesome conditions. They insisted on justice, brotherhood, and kindness. Religion was concerned with human welfare or it was no religion at all. Life, conduct, behavior were essential. Without these, powerful and prosperous reigns would come to naught.

Reading 78: 2 Kings 15:8-31

THE LAST KINGS OF ISRAEL

The Northern Kingdom was short-lived after the overthrow of the dynasty of Jehu. With the death of Jeroboam anarchy broke loose. Within two decades there were six kings on the throne and four changes of dynasty. In this time only one king (Menahem) was succeeded by his son; four were assassinated and one captured in battle. These conspiracies, changes, and appeals for foreign help were the expression of deeper maladies. Political, social, and religious conditions were chaotic. The prophets had been unable to halt the internal corruption and strife. This condition was aggravated by the misgovernment of weak rulers. Crushing invasions of strong powers with their divergent ways of life threatened the stability of the nation and the security of the people. Consult your Bible and *ABC* (pp. 433*b*-34) on the reigns of Zechariah (vv. 8-12),

Shallum (vv. 13-16), Menahem (vv. 17-22), Pekahiah (vv. 23-26), and Pekah (vv. 27-31).

Israel's misfortune was Assyria's opportunity. There was on her thrown a ruler of commanding ability. Tiglath-pileser III was an able conqueror and organizer. The conditions in Israel were too inviting for him to resist. In 738 B.C. Menahem was having trouble with affairs at home. He was without allies and had no capable army. It would be futile for him to oppose Tiglath-pileser's invasion of Palestine, for that warrior had already restored to the land of Assyria "nineteen districts of the city of Hamath." To this Menahem added his tribute of a thousand talents of silver. This was an enormous amount, and Tiglath must have considered it "easy money." It was the equivalent of two million dollars, or about fifteen times that in actual purchasing power. But the burden of this cost was not on Menahem. He had avoided war and had gained Assyria's help against the enemies of his throne among his own people. He did not even have to float a loan or struggle with a national debt. He put the expense upon his own generation. His own rich and rebellious countrymen had received protection. These were not lacking in revenue. There were about sixty thousand landed proprietors in the country, and the king demanded fifty shekels from each of these.

Four years later another crisis brought the powerful Assyrian leader back to the westland. Those who opposed Menahem's heavy bribe to Tiglath-pileser became strongly anti-Assyrian. As patriots they looked to the army for relief. They decided to get rid of Pekahiah, who like his father remained loyal to the overlord of his throne. They secured Pekah, a military leader, for the bloody deed which was to bring him his victim's throne. Pekah's triumph committed him to a confederacy with Syria and other Palestinian states against Assyria. This league resulted in the Syro-Ephraimite War, which brought Tiglath-pileser against Israel (v. 29) in 734 B.C.

Reading 79: 2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28

THE REIGN OF AHAZ OVER JUDAH

Ahaz was a stubborn individualist who wished to live his own kind of life. He did not hesitate to refuse the counsel

of political leaders or to throw overboard the teachings of the prophets. He could neither rule nor take advice.

The political career of Ahaz was filled with difficulties. The surrounding nations were ready to take advantage of him, to use him for their own ends. The Edomites had taken back their port on the gulf of Akabah and made inroads into Judah from the south. The Philistines recaptured their cities which had been made tributary to Judah. But it was the coalition of Israel and Syria that threw Ahaz into a panic. The kings of these powers, Pekah and Rezin, formed a block to resist the onslaught of Assyria. They asked Judah to join them under threat of force. This faced Ahaz with a real crisis. He must decide whether he should join, resist, or play politics with Assyria for protection.

The prophet Isaiah insisted that alliance with Assyria held no solution for the king's problem. This would be to sacrifice his country's independence. He advised the king to mind his own affairs with trust and confidence.

Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus pressed their claims with the sword. Their armies overran northern Judah, took numerous captives, and demanded the surrender of Jerusalem. Ahaz must join the confederacy or yield his crown to one of its own choosing, the "son of Tabeel." But Ahaz rejected all proposals with fear and trembling and sent his distress call to Tiglath-pileser. He promised him both tribute and vassalage if he would only pull the allied kings off his back. The Assyrian responded posthaste and came down with an overwhelming force. Israel was the first to suffer, but not so severely as Syria. Damascus was soon isolated, its king (Rezin) killed, and its population taken captive to Kir. The whole kingdom was absorbed. From this time on that area was a province of Assyria.

Having entangled himself with Tiglath-pileser, Ahaz played his game well. In abject submission he came to temporary headquarters at Damascus to fawn on the conqueror. Here an attractive heathen altar caught his fancy. He ordered a reproduction of it for the Temple in Jerusalem and dedicated the new altar personally. The gods of Assyria were on his side.

But all this favor of Assyria was expensive. The tribute had to be paid annually. Judah was becoming bankrupt. Her vassal king was forced to break up the brass furnishings of the Temple to meet his payments. It was a trying time, especially for the prophets. Their God was being dethroned. The king found no room either for prophets or patriots. It is no wonder that men like Isaiah and Micah were fervent and strong in their demands for justice and righteousness.

Reading 80: 2 Kings 17; 18:9-12

THE FALL OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

The accounts of the reign of the last king of Israel are too brief to show us the full course of events. It is clear that Hoshea was under the dominion of three Assyrian kings. His own kingdom had diminished and his treasury was empty. His annual payments of tribute were excessive, beyond his power to pay. His loyalty was limited. He could not avoid trouble with Assyria, and conspiracy with Egypt offered a ray of hope. His rebellion, his promise of obedience, his imprisonment, and the ultimate fall of his nation followed naturally. Consult *ABC* on this chapter (pp. 434*b*-35) for a reconstruction of the actual course of events.

The capture of Samaria was not easy. It was a choice fortress. Shalmaneser V found it barred against him. He set up his starvation siege, which lasted three years. Before these years of agony were ended Shalmaneser died. His throne went to Sargon II, who carried on the conquest and recorded the fall of Samaria as his first military victory. In accordance with the Assyrian policy of conquest, Sargon deported a large number of the inhabitants of Israel and scattered them over the northern part of his own land (17:6). In place of these he brought into Samaria from Babylon and upper Syria as large a population as he had taken out.

The kingdom of Israel ceased as a political unit with the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.). The national spirit was broken, but many of the people still remained in the land. The depopulated portion had been refilled with people from abroad. The country became a real part of the Assyrian empire. Natives and foreigners did not remain apart; they intermarried, spoke a common language, and joined in worship (17:41). From this mix-

ture of peoples descended those who were known in later history as Samaritans. In the course of time they established a separate center of worship at Mount Gerizim. In the N. T. they appear as a distinct religious group. As a mixed people with a mongrel faith they were despised and denounced by the Jews.

It was long assumed that Sargon had deported all the population of Israel. Devout people speculated on the destiny of the "ten lost tribes." Would these be found again? Some have held that the American Indians were their descendants; others have declared that these tribes became the Anglo-Saxon race. Such theories, however, have no historical basis and are not held by students of ethnology. Sargon himself throws light on the problem. We learn from his inscription that he took 27,290 people into exile. This was a small portion of the population, only the leaders whose presence endangered his rule. The great bulk of the people of Samaria was not disturbed. This would mean that the tribes were never lost in the sense of being misplaced or forgotten. They were merged into the life of other groups, as salt is dissolved in water. The identity of the tribes was lost, but the people themselves, both those who were taken and those who were left, were absorbed by the groups with whom they mingled.

Determine the cause of Israel's fall (17:7-41). Was her ruin due to political and economic reasons, to God, or to her own debased character? The event made a profound impression on the Hebrews. The people of that day believed that God was first of all a rewarder of goodness and a punisher of evil. For them the disaster meant that Israel had been bad. The priestly writers found this badness in her rejection of Jehovah and her service of other gods; she had built up the high places against the warnings of the prophets. The prophets themselves, however, found Israel's chief guilt in her own injustice, oppression, and other social sins. Neither of these interpretations gives the total picture. The nation's sad plight did not come entirely from her badness. It could not be explained fully by the vengeance of God. God works through law, and there are physical, economic, social, and moral laws. Some catastrophes are not the result of the sins of the victim, as we can see in the fate of various small countries in the second World War. In a sense Israel fell just because she was in the path of Assyria's

greedy ambition; the conqueror wanted her wealth. But in a deeper sense Israel's fall was of her own doing. She had been falling for years. Her greed and lust had destroyed her character. Debasing ritual had taken the place of true worship. Her ideals were gone and she had no God left. She faced her peril with nothing worth saving, for her soul had been destroyed already.

Reading 81: 2 Kings 18–19; 2 Chronicles 29–32

HEZEKIAH AND THE INVASION OF SENNACHERIB

Hezekiah faced numerous political and religious problems during his extended reign. Three chapters in Kings (18-20), four in Chronicles (29-32), many passages in Isaiah, and Sennacherib's own inscriptions have to do with the questions and issues of his rule. No attempt is made here to set in order the chief events of his life or to establish the proper relationship of all the data on his career. It is important, however, to note that (1) much of the public ministry of the prophet Isaiah was during Hezekiah's reign, (2) the passage in 2 Kings 18:13–20:19 is, with slight variations, identical with the one in chs. 36-39 of Isaiah, and (3) that 2 Kings 18:17–19:8 and 19:9-36 are regarded as two accounts bearing on the same invasion.

Early in the reign of Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) Hezekiah of Judah and his western allies rebelled against Assyria (18:7, 13). After establishing peace in his own domain, the mighty king with his powerful army came west (701) and marched down the coast. He took possession of numerous cities and established a temporary throne at Lachish to receive the homage of conquered peoples. With these victories and this base of supplies he ventured into the mountains of Judah. At this juncture the army of Egypt appeared to divert the efforts of Shalmaneser. But the new foe was soon beaten and the hopes of all who had leaned on that "broken reed" were crushed. Jerusalem was in panic as town after town fell to the unchecked Assyrian conqueror. Engineers hurriedly put the city into a state of defense. But as the fierce soldiers approached the walls the courage of all within failed. Those who had clamored for rebellion were under its ruin. Hezekiah had to play his last card—submission through tribute (18:14-16). The burden was heavy, involving a sum of money equivalent to the purchasing power of twenty-

five million dollars today and the surrender of Hezekiah's own daughters and various other women for the harem at Nineveh. But Jerusalem was spared. Sennacherib withdrew his army and gave his assurances.

The calm convictions of Isaiah are evident in both accounts of this invasion (19:6-7, 20f.). The hesitancy of Hezekiah, the derision of Sennacherib, and the ridicule of the besiegers and the defenders only emphasize the assurances of the prophet. Isaiah had earned his right as a statesman. For years he had labored to hold his nation to her allegiance. With the rivalry and clash of world powers and her own internal conflicts, this was the only possible way of escape. But the prophet had labored in vain. Judah, trusting in the might of Egypt, had revolted. The penalty was swift and severe. The country was laid waste and Jerusalem cowed. But Isaiah was more than statesman. He proved himself a watchman of the Lord also. In his international policy and plea for peace he placed God above armies and counsels. Hezekiah and his people trembled with fear before the finest military machine of the ancient world. But Isaiah was confident that the Assyrian king would not come into Jerusalem. He clung to his belief in the supremacy of spiritual power over material force. Ruthless might was an affront to God's eternal order. He must know whether spiritual power could meet armed force. "There is only one answer; it did." (Knopf, *The O. T. Speaks.*) The Hebrew, Greek, and Assyrian sources vary but they all indicate the same results. Jerusalem survived and the Assyrian power was broken.

Reading 82: 2 Kings 20

HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS AND BABYLONIAN POLITICS

Observe Hezekiah's sickness, his deep concern, his consultation of Isaiah, his prayer, his lack of assurance, his recovery, and his hymn of praise. Here is a story that is as true to life today as it was then. We have made great advance in our knowledge of disease and its treatment. Yet for us too there are limits. Men still suffer, our homes are still subject to the dread of this foe, and in the end death claims us all. We still need to turn to God, asking his blessing on our means of healing, seeking from him strength and healing of spirit. Notice

that the prophet added to the king's prayer the use of the best treatment which he knew (v. 7).

The inscriptions and their decipherment have increased our understanding of Merodach-baladan and his ambassadors to Jerusalem. We now know that under him Babylon was in conflict with Assyria. He was consolidating his power with help from the outside. He wrote letters to numerous kings and induced many to join his confederacy. To the king of Elam went these words: "Assemble your army. Muster your forces. Hasten to Babylon. Strengthen our hands. You are indeed our reliance." The embassy to Hezekiah was not just to congratulate him on the recovery of his health. The king was more interested in maintaining the health of Babylon. The polite inquiry on health was only a pretext. The investigation of the treasury and resources of Judah reveals the real motive. The group had not come to congratulate a king but to persuade him to join an alliance. Can the nations of earth be frank, straightforward, and open in their policies? Are secrets and pretexts essential in diplomacy?

The foolish pride of Hezekiah yielded to the political embassy from Babylon. He longed to contribute to Assyria's defeat. He was ready to join any effort to break her power. All his resources were for his country's protection. But Isaiah was the true savior of his country. He knew the might of Assyria and was not unmindful of Babylon's aims. He saw through the folly of his own king. Hezekiah had been rash in joining the revolt against Assyria and in arousing the greed of Babylon through the disclosure of Judah's resources.

Reading 83: 2 Kings 21

THE POLICIES OF MANASSEH AND AMON

Judah was a little kingdom, steadily declining, living by the sufferance of the great powers—Egypt to the south, more especially Assyria to the north (or east). Manasseh threw in his lot with Assyria, although Chronicles suggests that he rebelled once. The important matter here is not political—little Judah was really helpless. It was religious. Judah could remain loyal to God in her religion and so also loyal to herself. That was what the prophet wanted. But others thought differently. "If Assyria is so mighty and successful, let us accept her

ways and worship her gods," they said. Hence the new idolatry entered. At the same time the doors were opened to the old superstitions which had lived on in the land. And with this went violence and oppression—as Assyria treated Manasseh, so Manasseh treated his people. Judah may have been fairly secure and prosperous under Manasseh, but religiously she reached a new low. So the judgment in that striking sentence: "I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down" (v. 13*b*). Oppressors come and go, but if a people remain faithful to God and its ideals it will not perish. Europe and the second World War have given us new illustrations.

Manasseh's most drastic innovations were in the realm of religion. As a vassal of Assyria he readily granted hospitality to her religious customs. The worship of the "host of heaven" was introduced into the very courts of the Temple as well as practiced from the housetops. Many had never favored the reforms of the prophets. This group was ever ready for a reaction. They were always clamoring for a return to the Canaanitish practices of earlier times. The king's open-door policy had influenced his people. As the Assyrian gods entered the gods of Baal reentered.

The roots of these radical religious changes run deeper than Manasseh's liberal political interest. The idealism of the prophets had never been fully accepted. They had lifted up to public gaze the grafters, the pleasure hunters, and the licentious practices of the time. These had been overpowered, but not banished. The condemned clamored for the good old days and for a chance to get even with their enemies. Likewise the recent reforms of Hezekiah had failed to grip the popular mind. These had come from the orders of the king and not through the conversion of the people.

This lively hatred of the prophets and their efforts was at home under Manasseh. All kinds of discarded practices were revived. The prophetic party protested in vain. The persecution of the prophets was severe (vv. 16, 24). Tradition says that the aged Isaiah was sawed asunder in the slaughter. The prophets were not beaten; they were only suppressed. They

could not speak, but they could write. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of a new faith.

Reading 84: 2 Kings 22:1–23:28; 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:19

JOSIAH AND THE LAWBOOK IN THE TEMPLE

Josiah's reign opened the door for the prophetic party, and a great change of policy ensued. The persecuted prophets were coming back into control. A resurgence of true nationalism was under way.

This change of front did not just happen. Friendly influences had been exerted all through the darker days. The feeble rule of the new king of Assyria made possible a freedom of religious action unknown for years. Faithful partisans who had passed through the fires of persecution were hearty in their support of any movement of relief. Those who had murdered king Amon were determined to end the foreign regime of Manasseh. The disturbing turn of events caused the people to feel the disapproval of God on their ways. Hordes of Scythians poured down from the north. There was no one to halt the spread of this tidal wave of barbarians toward Judah. The scare was the occasion of the rise of two new prophets. Zephaniah and Jeremiah boldly proclaimed this new danger as the scourge of the Lord. Thus interpreted, the terror became an aid to the reformers. It placed the sanction of God upon them. Jerusalem had remained untouched, but only to set her own house in order. Josiah, now old enough to make his own decisions, took the lead in the policies of reform.

As Josiah was having the Temple repaired he sent his secretary to audit the money contributed for that purpose. At the completion of the job Hilkiah the high priest gave the secretary a Lawbook which had been found in the Temple. The king was profoundly impressed with its contents. The book upheld standards of conduct which neither the king nor his people had followed. Its laws were being violated by all. The book also made plain the curses ahead for the nation unless the people made this book the basis of their belief and practice. The king was alarmed. A thorough reform was the only way to prevent a crisis. He immediately set on foot a great house cleaning. All religious practices must be revised and life must be brought into line with the regulations of this book. The king threw all

his energy into this task. He called all the men of Judah into the Temple courts where he himself read the book. With its blessings and curses before them, Josiah and his people exchanged their pledges to make the new-found book the law of the land.

What was this book, and how did it originate? The fears which its curses aroused and the reforms which followed give us a hint. It seems certain that the book contained the older portions of our book of Deuteronomy. The prophets of Manasseh's reign had no hearing. They had to work secretly. They recast the older legislation ascribed to Moses to make it apply to the issues of their own day. As this new legislation was in the spirit of the Great Lawgiver, the persecuted prophets used the literary device of putting its words in the mouth of the founder of Israel's faith.

Observe the three chief reforms enforced by Josiah and his people. The principal features of each of these are found in the Law of Deuteronomy. Josiah's first step was to cleanse the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem. There was to be neither idol nor symbol. The stone pillars and wooden poles were destroyed. Wizards and all ministrants of impurities went by the board. Jehovah was to have no rivals (see Deut. 7:5; 12:3; etc.). Josiah also demanded the destruction of the high places, featuring the use of the one sanctuary in Jerusalem (see Deut. 12). A third main feature of the reform was the modification of the Passover festival. Hitherto this had been a family feast, celebrated at home. Now those joining in the rite must come to the great celebration in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Written Work.—With this study of Josiah as an example write out a pointed message to your laymen on "Some Reforms that we Need Today." Point out evils to be remedied and changes needed in church and community if we are to be faithful to the law of the spirit of Christ.

Reading 85: 2 Kings 23:28–24:7; 2 Chronicles 35:20–36:8

KING JEHOIAKIM AND HIS PROBLEMS

The decade following Josiah was far from peaceful. The beloved king himself was a world-war casualty. For some time prior to his death (609 B.C.) Babylon and Assyria had been in the bitter throes of war. Each of these powers had strong

allies. The situation grew desperate for Assyria. Nineveh, her mighty capital, was destroyed (612) and the whole empire with its new center in the west was in the grip of the foe (609). Necho II of Egypt was determined to halt Babylon and save Syria for himself. As he was rushing his army to the protection of Assyria, he met Josiah at Megiddo. On learning Josiah's opposition to Assyria, Necho dispatched him either by murder or in a skirmish. But even this did not quench Judah's spirit of patriotism. The people hurriedly put Jehoahaz on the throne because he favored a policy of national independence.

Egypt was able to conquer northern Syria and set up headquarters at Riblah on the Orontes. Necho claimed the submission of all surrounding areas. He refused to leave an independent Judah. He deposed Jehoahaz in favor of his brother Jehoiakim (Eliakim), who became the willing vassal of Egypt. Necho laid a heavy war indemnity on Judah. The king called on the nobles for the money and they in turn took it from the masses. These heavy demands were increased by the selfish king's order of an elaborate palace for himself. Others joined in this oppression of the common people, who suffered greatly. Democracy was being overthrown and despotic Jehoiakim was leading the way.

But there was a shift in international affairs. The king of Babylon had his eye on this region, and the conquests of Egypt were not pleasing to him. The forces of the two powers clashed at Carchemish (605 B.C.), and Egypt suffered a severe defeat. Her grip on Palestine was broken and Babylon was master of Judah. Jehoiakim readily forsook Necho for Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon. But his loyalty was only for a time, till he could break away. After three years under the influence of Egypt he withheld his tribute. Nebuchadrezzar was busy at the moment, but he ordered bands of freebooters from neighboring provinces to harry the countryside of the little rebel.

Reading 86: 2 Kings 24:8-17; 25:27-30

JEHOIACHIN AND HIS SURRENDER OF JERUSALEM

Jehoiachin's rebellious father had hastened the ruin of Judah. With the opening of the military season of 597 B.C. Nebuchadrezzar was on the march to Jerusalem with his army. King Jehoiakim, however, who had provoked the war, died before that army arrived, and his son Jehoiachin became king. As the army

of Nebuchadrezzar approached Jerusalem the people were alarmed. The city was besieged. Confusion reigned. Counsel was divided. Could an eighteen-year-old king substitute daring for statesmanship? The advice of some was to fight it out, while others advocated surrender. The prophet Jeremiah maintained that Judah had sinned beyond forgiveness and that the leaders should make peace with the king of Babylon. The youthful Jehoiachin soon recognized the folly of resistance. At the end of three months he voluntarily put himself and his family in the hands of Nebuchadrezzar and surrendered Jerusalem. The boy king, whose brief reign had been spent in the horrors of a siege, was sent at once to Babylon, where he was to spend the next thirty-seven years in prison.

This unconditional surrender of Jehoiachin was met by a relatively mild treatment from Babylon. Apparently none of the people were put to death. Nebuchadrezzar planned to cripple rather than conquer or destroy the city. He became familiar with its resources, personal and material. He sought to make it impossible for Judah to rebel again. As revolutions are usually fomented by leaders, he deported those of ability who were capable of causing trouble. The court, the aristocracy, the army, the artizans, and the men of wealth, perhaps as many as eleven thousand people, were taken to Babylon. He stripped the royal treasury and despoiled the sacred Temple.

These prisoners of war lost much, but they were not enslaved. Among the group deported to Babylon was the young priest Ezekiel, who later became the great prophet. From his book in our O. T. we learn something of the conditions imposed on the captives. Ezekiel lived with a colony of Jews on the canal Chebar, near the old city of Nippur. He had a house of his own and was free to visit other Jews in their homes.

But the orders of the conquerors left no time for the group to adjust their affairs in Judah. Large olive and fig orchards, valuable vineyards, and much property must have remained unsold. Lands and houses had to be abandoned.

Reading 87: 2 Kings 24:18-25:21; 2 Chronicles 36:11-12

ZEDEKIAH AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

With this *Reading* compare Jer. 37:1–39:18; 34:1-22; 27:1-11, as well as the passage from Chronicles.

The best and noblest people of Judah were deported to Babylon with Jehoiachin. This left behind in Jerusalem a group without ability, a "motley mob," a "scrambling crowd of incompetents." Ezekiel pictures them as headstrong, blind, and foolish (ch. 11). They lacked personal qualifications, but wealth and position were at their door. The homes, the holdings, and the positions of those who had been removed were theirs for the taking. A new social class sprang up, the newly rich. They were conceited and intolerant. Jehovah had spared them and put the sinners in exile. They considered themselves the favored of the Lord, the very apple of his eye. But the prophet of the Lord viewed them differently; they were "bad figs" (Jer. 24).

Nebuchadrezzar placed another son of Josiah on the surrendered throne of Judah. Zedekiah became the king of these "leftovers." He was of royal blood, but lacking in strong manly qualities. He was a weak ruler, young and without experience, listening to everybody's advice. His court was filled with upstarts. His policies of state were unstable, switched about to accord with the latest opinion.

Under the pressure of his court and the insistence of the prophets of fair weather, Zedekiah fostered a secret league against Babylon. An actual revolt, however, was prevented by the efforts of Jeremiah.

But the revolt was only delayed. Zedekiah was incapable of following able leadership. A few years later, encouraged by the presence of Egypt's renewed power, in open rebellion he withheld his tribute from Babylon. Jeremiah strongly opposed this procedure, but without success. The king was influenced by popular support and perhaps by his immediate personal interests. He lacked insight; he could not see beyond the present. Why do well-intentioned leaders often fail? Are courage, ability, and frankness essential in leadership? Does it make any difference whom we have as leaders and to whose counsel they adhere? It is tragic for a nation to have weak leaders, but it is tragic beyond measure for these to refuse to follow true guides.

Jeremiah saw beyond the wild joy of Jerusalem as the Babylonian siege was lifted through the shortsighted policies of Zedekiah. The prophet was convinced that Judah's fate was sure. A people who would free slaves for use in battle and then turn

around and enslave them again for personal profit when the dangers of battle had passed were a people without honor. (Jer. 34:8-22). A people with that kind of leadership, a nation with that kind of practice, was hardly worth saving. Nebuchadrezzar was sure to return with doom.

The inevitable judgment was not long in coming. The Egyptian army was scattered and the Babylonians pressed the siege again. Food supplies were scant and disease prevalent. Morale was breaking; some were surrendering to the mercies of the enemy. Within less than a year the walls were broken and the enemy entered Jerusalem. The king with his guards took to the desert, only to be captured and blinded and carried with others in chains to Babylon. The conquering soldiers stripped the city of everything of value, even the smashed brass of the Temple. They burned the Temple, the palace, and numerous homes of the people. Jerusalem's fate was severe, but it had been shaped by her own weak leaders and selfish people who failed to follow the true leadership of Jeremiah.

Reading 88: 2 Kings 25:22-26

JUDAH UNDER GEDALIAH, THE GOVERNOR

With this *Reading* compare Jer. 40–43. Judah was not turned into a desert through her capture by Nebuchadrezzar. The captives in Babylon did not leave Jerusalem depopulated. More people remained in Judah than had been removed in the two siftings. But these people were discouraged and disorganized; they were lacking in energy, material goods, and brains. Their needs were desperate. Jerusalem was hardly habitable. It was wholly inadequate as a center for the government of the colony in prospect.

Nebuchadrezzar took the peasants left behind under the protection of Babylon. He did not antagonize them unduly. He appointed Gedaliah, one of their own number, as governor. This was a wise choice. Gedaliah was the grandson of the powerful Shaphan. He was able, industrious, and high-minded as a leader; patient, brave, and loyal, as a ruler; a man of character and good will.

The governor set up his new capital at ancient Mizpah, seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. Modern excavations have yielded the governor's thick-walled residence against the city's inner

wall, if not the very sealed cistern into which his body was cast at the time of his murder. The sheiks of the nomadic bands and country villages came to headquarters to swear allegiance to the new government. With Jeremiah as his counselor Gedaliah began his difficult task. A hopeful community was soon under way. He advised the scattered peasants to return to their homes, to till the farms, and to keep the peace. He induced many of those who had fled from the country to come back and share in the process of rebuilding. He promoted the revival of agriculture. Prosperity was in evidence. Prospects were bright for a better day, for the re-establishment of a real "unified, industrious, agricultural Jewish colony" on their own homeland, under the sanction of Babylon.

But the improper mixture of ambition and intrigue brought disaster. The surrounding peoples did not want the rehabilitation of Judah. Ishmael, a rascal of royal blood from the line of David, spurred on by the jealous king of Ammon, planned murder. When apprised of the plot the unsuspecting ruler considered the proposed affair preposterous. As guests of the governor the conspirators took advantage of the friendliness of their host and killed him. With the community in panic the murderers made their escape to Ammon. Johanan and his band were terrified. Nebuchadrezzar would not overlook the slaughter of his soldiers. The colonists were in danger of being blotted off the map. They feared to await investigation. Jeremiah believed flight would be regarded by Babylon as the admission of guilt, so he advised calm, watchful waiting in Judah; but the more energetic leaders forced him to flee with the band to Egypt. Many, however, remained scattered over their own land, like sheep without a shepherd, as their devastated country was raided by enemies from the border states.

VI

FIRST AND SECOND CHRONICLES, EZRA, AND NEHEMIAH

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah in our Bible were in the Hebrew MSS. a single book bearing the title of Ezra. At first this one volume was part of a larger work which included the two books of Chronicles, the Hebrew Ezra being the sequel of the Chronicles. The work as a whole, Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah, was produced somewhere between 300 and 250 B.C. by an author whom we now designate as the Chronicler. Many were interested in history from the priestly point of view, as the familiar records and traditions of the Hebrews were already current in their prophetic setting; and the Chronicler responded to this interest with a new history which presented the glories of Israel as connected with her observance of the divine Law and ritual.

The two books of Chronicles in our Bible stand next to the books of Kings, to which they are related in content. The first nine chapters of Chronicles present a series of genalogies. The real story of the books begins in ch. 10 with the founding of the Hebrew monarchy and continues the history of Judah until the time of Cyrus, with hardly any reference to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. "This is the key to the book. Nothing is of real interest but Judah; and in Judah, Jerusalem; and in Jerusalem, the Temple." (J. E. McFadyen, *Messages of the Prophetic and Priestly Historians.*)

The aim of Chronicles, as joined to Ezra and Nehemiah and placed last in the Hebrew Bible, was to give " a history of Judah with special reference to the institutions connected with the Temple, under the monarchy, and after the restoration." (S. R. Driver.) This combined book, therefore, covered the period from the creation to the return of the exiles and the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem, just as Judges, Samuel, and Kings

together had presented the story from the conquest of Canaan to the Exile. The writer of this new narrative was interested in history and religion, but his viewpoint was that of the priests. He interpreted history according to the conceptions of religion after the Exile, which differed greatly from the earlier prophetic beliefs.

The learned men of Judah were unable to agree on the worth of Chronicles, since the events recorded therein were included in Samuel and Kings. So the Ezra-Nehemiah portion was severed from the rest and received into the canon of sacred Scripture, the books of Chronicles being received later. We do not, therefore, have separate *Readings* of the books of Chronicles but consider their material in connection with the various *Readings* in Samuel and Kings.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were composed by the Chronicler long after the age in which Ezra and Nehemiah lived, but the compiler made large use of the reliable memoirs of these two reformers and of other authentic materials. These books cover a period of well over a century, extending from the decree of Cyrus (538 B.C.) through the second visit of Nehemiah (432) to the return of Ezra with the Law (397). The record is not in the form of a continuous history; only certain events are recounted. There are long intervals on which the narrative is silent. The first part (Ezra 1–6) has to do with the years 538-516 B.C. and deals with the return from Babylon and the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem. After a gap of some seventy years comes the account of Nehemiah's return (444) and the rebuilding of the wall (Neh. 1–7; 11; 12), closing with the reforms of his second visit twelve years later (Neh. 13). Another break of thirty-five years is followed (397) with an account of Ezra's return (Ezra 7–8), the adoption of the Law (Neh. 8–10), and its enforcement (Ezra 9–10). (See *ABC,* p. 112.)

The memoirs or notes of Nehemiah, written by his own hand, formed an excellent firsthand source for the Chronicler in his history of Israel for this period. That source begins with the first verse of Nehemiah and extends through chap. 7. It is resumed in 11:1 and continues to the end of the book. This latter section may contain some inserted lists and other materials, but the bulk of it bears the marks of Nehemiah's own style (11:1-2; 12:4-31), or of his notes worked over by the

Chronicler (12:27–13:3). The book as a whole is a remarkable piece of writing which enables us to follow Nehemiah from the beginning to the end of his daring enterprise.

Reading 89: Nehemiah 1:1-11

NEHEMIAH'S GRIEF AND PRAYER

We know Nehemiah as we know few of the people in the O.T. The narrative of his life is fresh, rich, and full. We know him first as the cupbearer of the king of Persia. He was in high favor with the king and served him in intimate ways. He was active in the affairs of the government, ready in speech, and able in dealing with practical matters. His success was evident.

But Nehemiah's interests were not confined to Persia. His heart was wherever his Jewish people were in distress (5:8). He had a deep concern for the Law of the Lord and had not forgotten the "place of his fathers' sepulchres" (2:3). He was ever mindful of the Palestinian community that had survived the blow of the "captivity" long before.

But Nehemiah had not been in close touch with conditions at home. On the surface, progress seemed to prevail in Palestine. People were living in towns over a wide area. There were large families (5:2). Nothing is said about ruined villages or a scanty population in Judah as a whole. A firsthand report from "certain men out of Judah"(1:2) was necessary to bring home to Nehemiah the real plight of his people and the extent of their desolation.

Things had not been going well in Judah for a long time. The high hopes held as the rebuilding of the Temple was completed in 516 B.C. had given place to bitter disappointment. Malachi faced a discontented people in 460. Lax ways prevailed in the religious life. Mixed marriages were frequent in high circles. Many foreign influences were felt. The Sabbath was only loosely observed. Jerusalem itself was in a wretched condition; its walls and gates were still in ruins and its inner area was covered with rubbish. The natives were held in contempt by their non-Jewish neighbors, who came and went through Judah at will. Despair was settling down over the Jewish community. Disintegration was in prospect.

But there were faithful men who wanted to prevent the disastrous end. They longed for a vigorous reform, but they

lacked the power to bring it about. Their only hope was a strong leader, one who could overcome the hostile forces in the community, rally the despairing people, and win favor at the Persian court. All eyes turned to Nehemiah in this hour. His position, his piety, and his practices in relief (5:8) were well known, and "certain men" from Judah were sent on a definite mission to secure his help.

This group had not reckoned in vain. At once Nehemiah inquired concerning the people and affairs in Judah. He received a dismal answer: the remnant was in "great affliction and reproach," Jerusalem's wall was down and the gates were burned.

The report was a terrible shock to Nehemiah. He became aware of the extent of the desolation of the land from those who had personally felt its peril. He was completely overcome. "When I heard these words; . . . I sat down and wept, and mourned" and "fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (1:4). The actual words of his prayer may not have reached us; but we can be sure that the passionate confession of sin followed by an appeal to God for help (1:11) breathes the spirit of his prayer. During this mourning and facing of difficult conditions Nehemiah's own course became clear. One's duty and the needs of the hour are always intimately related.

Reading 90: Nehemiah 2

NEHEMIAH'S COMMISSION TO JERUSALEM

The situation in Jerusalem was desperate. Nehemiah must take vigorous hold of matters in person. This required that he be governor in charge, clothed with the authority of the king. But to request such an appointment involved serious risk. The king might be offended, for Nehemiah was a trusted and useful officer. The desired errand would take him far from his position for a long time. Should Nehemiah's petition fail, he would fall from royal favor. Such a course, too, meant great personal sacrifice. Few people would be willing to relinquish a successful life with pleasant and familiar surroundings at the very center of the empire to undertake a difficult mission in a distant and depleted province.

But Nehemiah shared the faith of the prophets. Personal considerations must be brushed aside for the interests of God. He would face dangers boldly for his God. His risk and sacri-

fice had the sanction of God and to him he prayed, "Prosper . . . thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man [the king]" (1:11*b*). Thus fortified he ventured into the presence of the king. At the opportune moment he made his bold request. The king was considerate of his servant, allowed him permission to go to Jerusalem, supplied him with letters of convoy, and granted him materials from the royal possessions for the work of rebuilding. Nehemiah's faith and prayers were not in vain.

In due time Nehemiah with his escort from the army reached Jerusalem. He had come as a friend to the discouraged in Judah. He sought the welfare of the Israelities (v. 10). But his intention of rebuilding was unknown. He must first see conditions of Jerusalem for himself. His plan would take shape from a reliable survey.

After a thorough inspection of the wall by night Nehemiah was ready to disclose his purpose. He found the wall in ruin as had been reported, but he saw that the ruins could be repaired. He called for a public assembly and talked to the priests, the nobles, the rulers, and the common people. He urged them to remove their reproach by building up the wall of Jerusalem. The response was immediate, as they said, "Let us rise up and build."

What enabled Nehemiah to win a discouraged community to his plan? Rebuilding the wall was a heavy task for their slender resources. The morale of the people was low. But this layman faced the facts and evolved a constructive plan. By his own personal conviction and faith in God, with burning energy and determination, supported by the influence he had acquired with the king, Nehemiah won over his compatriots; and the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt.

Reading 91: Nehemiah 4

OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF NEHEMIAH

The opponents of Nehemiah were determined. They joined forces for a combined attack upon the work of restoration. They first tried ridicule and scorn (2:19-20; 4:2-3). But sneers and mockery could not cope with conviction and faith. Such tactics might cut defenders to the quick and produce loud guffaws among opponents, but they could not check Nehemiah. He was

more than an architect. He was a director, a defender, a diplomat, a real leader with convictions and plans.

The opponents also sought to confuse the workers. They tried to destroy the morale of the people on the job. They worked on those not in full sympathy with the seperatist program. They increased the number of the half-persuaded. Cowardly Jews living near the enemies kept coming to Jerusalem and urging the workers to go back home. The greatness and the hardships and the dangers of the task were becoming more evident every day. There was much rubbish, and the strength of the burden bearers was growing less. Some were saying, "We are not able to build the wall" (v. 10).

But Nehemiah was ready for this effort at confusion by the foe. He met the new attack with faith and decision. As he prayed to God, he set a watch against the conspirators day and night. Back of the wall he posted armed guards and urged "the nobles, . . . the rulers, and . . . the rest of the people" to take heart. "Be not ye afraid; . . . fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (v. 14*b*).

The halt in the assault of the enemies allowed the people to return to their work, but Nehemiah did not abate his efforts. He took measures of precaution and made provision for continued protection. People went about their work girt with swords and under guard. They were under instruction to combine for the aid of each other at the blast of the trumpet. The workers from the country remained in Jerusalem as a guard by night. It was a time of constant danger. Neither workers nor guards dared put off their clothes. But the able leader kept his head, busied his hands, organized and heartened his people, and made clear his over-all plan; and the wall went on to speedy completion.

Reading 92: Nehemiah 5

NEHEMIAH'S GENEROSITY AND SOCIAL REFORMS

Internal dissension endangered co-operation. "There arose a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews" (v. 1). The hard lot of the poor was apparent. They complained of the exactions of the well-to-do. There was a shortage of food, and taxes were high. Times were hard, and people who had left their farms and other work for a labor of love on the city's wall were now out of bread. The poorer

classes had to borrow in order to live. Some had mortgaged their fields, vineyards, and houses to pay taxes. The local lenders, the wealthy Jewish creditors, were taking lands and children as collateral. The needy people were helpless as their farms were taken and their children enslaved.

This misery of the people could no longer be ignored. Now that his building enterprise was less exacting, Nehemiah would not tolerate a situation in which some of the people were bleeding the rest of the colony. He "was very angry" when he heard the cry of Israel's needy. He took the nobles and rulers to task for demanding interest from brother Jews. He "held a great assembly against them," releasing the pressure of public opinion on them. Nehemiah's own generosity and that of his associates set off the hateful behavior of the loan sharks. He and his friends had been redeeming those who had been sold into slavery to the heathen, so far as they were able (v. 8). He had been lending money and grain without interest to the people of Jerusalem (v. 10). For more than a decade he had served as governor without salary, and he was feeding many of the poor from his own purse (vv. 14-19). His appeal to the rich was in the name of the cause for which he and others had sacrificed dearly. "The thing that you do is not good," said he. "I pray you, let us leave off this usury." He asked them to return at once to the debtors their real estate and 1 per cent of the money and produce exacted of them. The creditors were won over by this plea. They readily acceded to Nehemiah's requests, but to make sure he had them confirm their agreement with an oath. This was a distinct moral victory, which bespoke the great personal influence of Nehemiah.

Reading 93: Nehemiah 6

SCHEMES TO ENTRAP NEHEMIAH

With feverish haste the wall was completed. Only the gates were lacking. When the foes became aware of this they were chagrined. They had been outdone. But they would still play their last card, and use trickery, fright, and treachery.

Four attempts were made to lure Nehemiah into a would-be conference away from Jerusalem, but he saw through this scheme to get him into the power of his enemies. His answer was significant: "I am doing a great work; . . . why should the

work cease?" Such a procedure would solve many issues and prevent the defeat of many noble ends in our day as it did in his. The fifth attempt of the enemy was supported by a letter charging Nehemiah, by implication, with treason against the Persian king. Such an impeachment was dangerous in a world where the accused person was executed and then investigated. But Nehemiah was not subject to fright nor deterred by danger. He stoutly denied that he was a rebel, implying that his advisers knew better than to push the charge. He simply pressed on with his work, praying to God for help.

The efforts at treachery by the enemy were also futile. Several of the prophets in Jerusalem were bribed to work on Nehemiah with reported oracles from God. But Nehemiah was too keen and quick-witted to be entrapped. He saw through the deceptive advice and escaped the trap.

Observe that Tobiah kept up the struggle after the efforts of the others had ceased. He was closely connected by marriage with the Jewish nobility. Many of these were his friends. Letters passed between him and the nobles of Judah. Evidently he wanted to become a recognized member of the Jewish community, and for this he would become reconciled with Nehemiah. But the latter had his doubts of the good things told him about Tobiah. His deeds could not be put away by mere words.

Reading 94: Nehemiah 7:1-4; 11:1-2; 9:5-38; 12:27-43

PRESERVING AND USING WORTHY ACHIEVEMENTS

Nehemiah did not stop with the completion of the walls. He sought to preserve his gains, to make use of that which had been won at great price. Without vigilance and protection the people would suffer loss. The city was placed in charge of a special governor and organized. It needed to be provided with houses and with inhabitants. Precautions were taken against the inactive and the late sleepers.

Nehemiah was able in managing men and affairs. He showed himself a real leader in the dedication of the city's wall. The solemn festival would impress the community with the large significance of the enterprise. Notable people sharing in solemn service would promote the sense of unity. Processions with special odes (Psa. 48) and numerous instruments for music would intensify and conserve the values of religion.

The outline of that ancient formal ceremony is still visible. The princes of Judah were separated into two groups and marched in opposite directions around the top of the wall, a "great company of people" following each group. Each procession was most joyful, enlivened by the music of instruments and by songs of thanksgiving. At last the two companies met in the Temple enclosure in triumphant gratitude as the "great sacrifices" were offered, and the voices of all mingled in song, "so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."

Reading 95: Nehemiah 13:4-31

NEHEMIAH'S SECOND ADMINISTRATION

Nehemiah's first term of office lasted twelve years. In this time he did much more than build a wall. He produced a new and hopeful community. The people became self-respecting and even aggressive under his rule. A new sense of national importance arose. He did "all that a conscientious, energetic, deeply religious governor" could do to remove the miseries of his people and to "inspire the community with national pride and devotion to its God" (James, *Personalities of the O. T.*).

We do not know why Nehemiah returned to the Persian king or how long he was absent from Jerusalem. It is a tribute to his influence that he kept the royal confidence for so many years, in the king's presence and away, at a time when false reports and intrigues were circulated against him by his enemies. We know that "after certain days" at the Persian court Nehemiah came again to Jerusalem (vv. 6-7). He felt that his presence was still needed, that his task was not yet finished.

Nor had he reckoned amiss. Matters had not gone well in his absense. He projected five important reforms and carried them out in a very strenuous way. The high priest had allowed Tobiah to occupy the storeroom where the Temple offerings had once been kept. Nehemiah was outraged and took sharp action to restore the room to its proper use. The Temple was empty of its ministers. Without the support due them these had to go back to the farm for a living. The responsibility for this was on the rulers, and Nehemiah saw that the Levites and singers were restored to their place in the Temple. For their proper care "all Judah" was required to pay up the tithes, and trustworthy men were appointed over the treasury to distribute

its stores. Nehemiah's return was uncomfortable for the nobles in another way; he put the blame for the disregard of the Sabbath on them as he took steps to stop its violation and set up its correct observance. The mixed marriages and their consequences moved Nehemiah to his highest pitch of anger. "And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God" (v. 25). The grandson of the high priest, who had married the daughter of Sanballat, was expelled from office and from Judah. These rigorous reforms with the corporate act of purging which followed may have unified and heartened the Jewish community, but in its execution (v. 25) it was "a sorry piece of business" (*ABC,* p. 476*b*). It detracts from Nehemiah's noble life and work. But religion has its excesses, and Nehemiah lived four centuries before Jesus, with his emphasis on the spirit of the Law and his message of love and universal brotherhood.

Some things about Nehemiah repel us: his narrow nationalism, his bitterness toward others than Jews, his contracted views of God, his race-purity program, his ruthless discipline of other people, and his consuming interest in the ceremonial side of religion. But the dominant impression is that of a great leader of unselfish devotion. He gave himself utterly to the service of God and his people. He was not interested in personal gains. The religious destiny of Israel was his chief concern. With all this were blended "other qualities—simplicity, transparent sincerity, courage, directness, intense faith in God and in prayer, untiring energy, reliability, dogged persistence, imagination to see the possibilities of a desperate situation and daring to make them real. He was a leader, able to carry men with him in the accomplishment of a stupendous undertaking" (James, *Personalities of the O.T.,* p. 458).

Written Work.—Review the *Readings* on Nehemiah and list three or four suitable subjects for a series of talks on his life and character and work. Write a summary of one of these talks.

Reading 96: Ezra 7:1–8:1; 8:15-36

EZRA'S PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM

The first part of the book of Ezra (chs. 1-6) is not about Ezra. It contains the Chronicler's historical work on a period long before Ezra lived. The rest of this book (chs. 7-10) and

a portion of the book of Nehemiah (chs. 8-10) contain the chief sources of our knowledge of Ezra and his work. Much of this narrative is presented in the first person by Ezra (Ezra 7:27–9:15), and is often referred to as the "I" narrative. This portion has for its opening section the letter written in the Aramaic, which claims to be from the Persian king, clothing Ezra with large powers (7:12-26). There is another account of Ezra in the third person, which is known as the "He" narrative (Ezra 10; Neh. 8–10).

Many scholars regard the "I" narrative as a real memoir of Ezra himself. Most of this group look upon the "He" narrative as derived from the Ezra notes, with the Chronicler changing the first person into the third and working over the material in general. This view seems sound. It makes plain that the book of Ezra presents a reliable picture of the man and his work.

Ezra came to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (7:7). As there were two Persian kings of this name to whom the account may refer, we cannot be sure whether Ezra appeared in 458 or in 397. The latter date, however, has strong support, for Nehemiah's work (444) was during the high priesthood of Eliashib (Neh.3:1) and Ezra's during that of Johanan (Ezra 10:6), the grandson of Eliashib (Neh. 12:11-22).

After Nehemiah there was great dissatisfaction in Babylon over the state of religion in Judah. The strict party in Jerusalem had lost ground and laxity was showing up, especially in marital matters. Over the years the captives in Babylon had become a substantial community, with numbers and wealth and power. But prosperity had not weaned their hearts from Jerusalem and their God. Some succumbed to their surroundings, but the bulk of the people looked on these with disapproval. There was a stronger zeal for vital Hebrew religion in Babylon than in the homeland. From the outset the captives were the people of ability (see Jer. 24:2). Many of Josiah's reform party were in the group, men with the high ideals of prophets and priests. Ezekiel had lived and worked among them in that strange environment in its first days. Absence from Jerusalem and pressure of things foreign intensified the devotion of the people to things Jewish. Learning flourished. Many gave themselves to the study of the Law, of the writings of the prophets, and of

the history of their great past. The scribe, the student of the Law, became a familiar figure. The enthusiasm of the leaders animated the community as a whole.

But these enthusiasts were not bent on making Babylon the center of Jewish piety. They wanted this in the homeland. Jerusalem was to be the religious center of devout and fervent Israel. Two things in the situation there called for action: the Temple still stood unadorned, and the home community was ignorant of the Law. Their laxities caused the Babylonian Jews much pain. It was high time for them to respond to God's requirements, and the Jews in exile had just the remedy needed. They were ready with a "book of the Law" which should be taken to Judah and put into practice. Nor were they lacking in leadership. Ezra, a learned scribe, was present, burning with zeal to secure the adoption at Jerusalem of the splendid standards of the religious and social life embodied in the Law. "He had set his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances" (7:10). He was determined to lead a caravan to Jerusalem and to direct the life of his people there.

After securing permission and aid from the Persian king, Ezra acted promptly and with large powers. A group of reliable men in dead earnest assembled on one of the canals in Babylon for the journey to Jerusalem. After four months that band of fifteen hundred males, perhaps five thousand persons in all, arrived safely in Jerusalem, with adequate commissions and contributions to give support to "the people and the house of God" (7:6-10; 8:31-36).

And what a support that was to the struggling Jews in Palestine! To receive an increase of five thousand in population overnight, men of means and personal influence; to feel the lift of enthusiasm and worthy gifts; to behold their beloved Temple in a splendor of which they had vainly dreamed; and to realize the practical support of able brethren beyond the desert—all this must have stirred that weak community with genuine joy and gratitude.

Written Work.—Prepare a brief sermon or address on Ezra, using Ezra 7:10 as a text. Consider the character of Ezra, his purpose, and what he accomplished.

Reading 97: Nehemiah 8–10

EZRA SECURES THE ADOPTION OF THE LAW

Observe that Nehemiah 8–10 belongs between Ezra 8:36 and 9:1. These three chapters of Ezra were probably transferred to Nehemiah by a copyist.

Ezra brought with him from Babylon a book of the Law far more complete than any in circulation. At length there was a popular demand for him to "bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel" (8:1). Ezra mounted a pulpit erected for the occasion and opened the scroll in the sight of all present. The great concourse of people stood up, and when Ezra prayed they lifted their hands, saying Amen, Amen, and then bowed in worship. The reading and interpretation of the Law followed in relays. We cannot at this late date reconstruct with assurance the whole scene, but it is clear that this expanded Law was presented to the people for their acceptance. The people were in tears over their failures; for the reading dealt with the prevailing laxities, and their conduct was far short of the requirements in the Law. With the people thus moved to repentance, Ezra and his helpers reminded them of their duty to rejoice. They had wandered far from the ways of God, but they now had his Law—for which they should be glad.

As they read in the Law of the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths), measures were taken to observe that feast. The people responded thoroughly, and for seven days "there was great gladness." On each day Ezra read to the people from the book of the Law. Emphasis was put on the goodness of God in giving the Law to Israel rather than on the penal side of the Law. By the time of the conclusion of this feast with holy convocation on the eighth day, Ezra had been able to introduce a large portion of the Law to the people.

This was an innovation by Ezra, and the people liked it. There is a side to Ezra's religion which has been overlooked. Although rigid in enforceing the Law, he considered himself an evangelist. He was an apostle of joy. Whoever carried out the will of God as disclosed in the Law would experience the gladness of a dutiful child in the presence of his loving father. Therefore grieving was out of order for the day on which the Law was introduced. The Law ought to make people glad, for

it opened a path to the ways of God. The day on which God's Law was read was consecrated to him, and for the moment the sorrow for their sins could remain in the background.

But sins must be reckoned with, and for this a fast was proclaimed (9:1). At this the people assembled again and "confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers." The prayer of confession in 9:6 f. gives the sense of what was uttered. It reviews God's sure mercies in the past, recognizes the sins and ingratitude of the people and the terrible consequences of wrong, and considers the recurring forgiveness of God. That God had not made a full end of his people now moved them to enter into a covenant to accept and keep the regulations of the Law. The leaders set their seal to the agreement, and the laity in general ratified what had been done. Ezra had obtained his end; the people were committed to the observance of the Law. They had been led to reach this decision, but they had acted without compulsion. Observe the six obligations mentioned in the covenant which was accepted and signed.

Reading 98: Ezra 9; 10:1-19, 44

EZRA ENFORCES THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONALISM

It was hard to enforce the laws of the covenant. All, under mass emotion, had pledged observance of the Law; but a chief item in the agreement was not carried out, as many of the people were married to foreigners. The situation in relation to mixed marriage had become serious. The princes and rulers were the chief violators. The news of this trespass was heavy upon Ezra. Tearing his garments (the sign of mourning), he "sat down confounded," remaining there all day while those who took the Law in earnest gathered about him in silence. Then, at the day's close, he fell upon his knees in prayer to God. We can still sense the agony of soul which Ezra poured out in that prayer. It was a confession of despair. "Behold, we are before thee in our guiltiness; for none can stand before thee because of this" (9:15*b*). The sight of this beloved leader plunged into despair had its effect, not unlike that of Gandhi's fasts upon the people of India. In vicarious agony their leader had taken upon himself the sins of the people, and thus had brought home to them the enormity of their guilt.

Their response was wholehearted. Said one: "We have tres-

passed . . . and married foreign women, . . . yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us . . . put away all the wives, and such as are born of them. . . . Be of good courage, and do it." (10:2*b*-3.) Ezra lost no time. He and his chiefs set in motion a plan to dissolve all such unions. Only four men were bold enough to oppose Ezra's demand. Their resistance was unsuccessful; Ezra's influence prevailed with the people, and wives and children were disowned.

The motive back of this matter of nationalism in religion and mixed marriages should not escape our attention (Deut. 7). Not only did gross superstitions, idolatry, and immoral practices mark the surrounding people; but these people lived on in the midst of the Jews, as is clearly seen here. The command utterly to "destroy them" was followed, rather curiously, by the strict prohibition of association with them or intermarriage—a recognition that they would not be destroyed, or had not been.

Once more we recognize how different our attitude is under Christian teaching. We know today how dangerous it is when religion and nationalism join hands, and what terrible results flow from national and race prejudice. Our religion is one of universalism, of brotherhood, and of mercy. Ezra had need to protest against the way in which purity of faith and life had been lost by this social amalgamation. But that does not excuse what was done with these innocent wives and children. No word of pity is expressed for them, no suggestion of provision made for them, no recognition of the fact that they were not the ones who had sinned in this matter. To put away wives and cast out little children with no aid was "a barbarous, cruel, atrocious deed," not less so because it was committed in the name of religion. "But we need cast no stones. The spirit of intolerance survives the flight of time." (*ABC*, p. 469*a*.)

We need to view Ezra and his religion against the background of his own day. Like Nehemiah, he possessed energy, initiative, and ability in leadership. He was selfless in his devotion to a cause. His faith in God and in prayer was intense. He was bent on making Israel a people of the Law. There were certain things about his religion which we neither like nor sanction today. We do, however, find room in our religion for his note of joy and that aspect of brotherhood which "sends portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared" (Neh. 8-10).

VII

ESTHER

The book of Esther is a nationalistic romance. It relates how Esther, a beautiful Jewish girl, became the wife and queen of Xerxes, the Persian king, and how, when her people were in peril of extinction, she declared her nationality and risked her life to save them from Haman, the king's favorite courtier.

The book was written long after the Persian period and far from the scenes which it describes. It was from a time when the Jews were filled with hatred for their enemies. The wars of the Maccabees, not far from 150 B.C., would supply the setting required by this intense nationalism.

The literary structure of the book is excellent. In form it is a short story, being, along with Ruth and Jonah, an early and splendid example of this type of creative literature. The story is told with skill. The action moves rapidly. The plot unfolds with symmetry. The style is worthy of a literary architect who knew the power of fiction: the prose is vigorous, the use of irony remarkable, the order of the incidents without flaw.

But the book's content does not match the high level of its structure. Both its purpose and its vividly drawn characters have faults. The author had two purposes. He wanted to intensify the patriotic fervor of the Jews and arouse their hatred of all others at a time when they were threatened by the inroads of the Greeks and the loss of their national life. He also wanted to explain the origin of the Feast of Purim, a late Jewish feast, which as here presented was to celebrate the escape of the Jews from the dangers of the days of Esther.

Both purposes of the book were subject to excesses. The result is that patriotism, not religion, is its prevailing sentiment. The Jews are glorified unduly. The author is resentful and bitter in attitude and spirit. As Luther remarked, he "Judaizes too much and has too much heathen naughtiness."

The characters—the king, Vashti, Haman, Mordecai, and

Esther—although vividly drawn, lack worth. They are self-seeking, designing, and cruel. They look out too much for themselves and are weak in their concern for others. But even here we should not overlook Vashti, with her courage and high convictions, and the brave and beautiful Esther, who after reaching the highest position for herself does not forget her people, and risks everything to save them.

Reading 99: Esther 3:1-6; 5:1–7:10

HAMAN'S RISE AND FALL

Try to obtain the story of Haman from these passages. Consider his character. Observe his pomp and anger, his conceit and gratification, his blunder and his final downfall. Why did Mordecai fail to bow down to Haman? Was his refusal due to his idea of worship or to his feeling of personal dignity and freedom? Why did Haman wish to destroy all Jews for the conduct of one? Why was he so elated over his invitation to Esther's banquet? What advice did the king seek from Haman?

Haman is the villain of this story. He was bigoted, ambitious, and cruel, the typical anti-Semitist. Mordecai was proud, deeply grieved over his nation's troubles, eager to secure relief, vengeful in his use of opportunity, yet loyal to the government. Mordecai withheld obeisance to Haman, who in a spirit of hate determined on the destruction of all Jews in the empire. As usual in pogroms, the attacks upon the people were senseless and without cause. However, Haman obtained the easy permission of the king to carry out his plot, for he had represented the Jews as a disloyal element. The hapless people were in deep distress until Esther came to their rescue. At the peril of life she invited the king with Haman to a banquet. A like invitation to a second banquet filled Haman with a sense of his own importance. Overwhelmed with this honor, he determined to take steps against Mordecai's fresh refusal of homage. He would not wait for the general massacre but would wreak his vengeance at once. Meantime the king became aware of an unrewarded service which Mordecai had rendered. At this he sought Haman's advice on how a king's friend should be honored. In his conceit Haman took himself to be that friend and shaped up honors as preferred. But he had misread the king's friend; the honors went to Morde-

cai, and the fate which he had plotted for his enemy came down upon his own head.

The influences that stirred in the heart of Haman are not absent from our own day. He was possessed with an inordinate vanity. He had been exalted, and this had turned his head. He was angered that one of the king's servants did not bow down to him as did the others. To be the only subject invited with the king elated him beyond measure. Exceptional honor from the king could hardly be for anyone other than himself. His whole behavior was charged with a spirit of vanity.

Haman's cruelty was as limitless as his vanity. His pride could not endure the indifference or independence of the humblest subject. He magnified slight faults into capital offenses. He charged the wrongs of an offender against the whole of the race to which the offender belonged. Nothing short of a wholesale slaughter of men, women, and children would satisfy him.

Haman is a typical illustration of what has been called "poetic justice"—of the selfish schemer who "falls into his own pit." He had to assist in bestowing upon the one for whom he had plotted evil the honors which he coveted for himself. This gives no basis for vindictive glee. The spirit of revenge is utterly un-Christlike. But this is another illustration of the relationship of conduct and destiny. The cruel man breeds foes by his very cruelty; vindictiveness is checked by the hatred which it arouses, and lying by the distrust which it begets.

Reading 100: Esther 4

ESTHER'S DECISION TO SAVE HER PEOPLE

This chapter presents the Jewish people in grave danger. Haman was enraged; he had decided to destroy all the Jews within his realm. Mordecai cried with "loud and bitter lamentation." There was "great mourning among the Jews" in every province.

Observe the cause of this panic. What was the remedy for it? Why did Mordecai halt at the king's gate without entering the palace? Why did he not accept the robe from Esther? Why was it dangerous for Esther to enter the inner court or go before the king? What was the "one law" for all who sought the king unsummoned? What was Mordecai's warning to Esther and what was her heroic decision?

Mordecai urged Esther to intervene in behalf of the Jews.

But to go before the king unasked was to take her life in her hands. She hesitated, especially as she had not been summoned to him for a month. Mordecai, however, insisted that she was obligated to her people, that she had everything to gain and nothing to lose. His arguments were stated with force. Each of his two points strengthened conviction, but they failed to support each other. The argument that Esther would perish with the rest of her people if the decrees were carried out did not jibe with the idea that her failure to act would be to lose the opportunity of a lifetime, as relief would rise up from another quarter. Logical arguments do not tell the full story of convictions. Esther carried in her heart a deep concern for her people. Their desperate situation had its appeal. Mordecai did more than declare his belief in man; he expressed confidence in the Divine, albeit the name of God does not occur in the book. He used human ingenuity and expected help from human sources, from Esther or others; but this did not exclude his belief in a divine agency shaping the affairs of history.

Esther's resolve to go to the king at the risk of her life was noble. Her declaration, "If I perish, I perish" (v. 16), is the expression not of despair but of a heroic spirit. It marks the highest moral level reached in the book. The loyalty of Esther to her people and her bravery in attempting to save them were the redeeming traits of her character.

Contrast the following statements. Which is the more accurate? "We must guard against the unfair conclusion that it [Esther] portrays in general the Jewish mind of that day, even in a time of bitterness and turbulence. It is far more fair to say that its author was as intolerant, dogmatic, and nationalistic as the authors of Ruth and Jonah were tolerant, liberal, and international. He was a good writer, but a small man." (Mary Ellen Chase, *The Bible and the Common Reader.*) "The author's purpose was not to give the biography of Esther or the history of Persia. He might have had an interest in explaining the origin of the Feast of Purim, but even that is less important than the message of tolerance. A Jewess could marry a Persian. A Persian could recognize Yahweh. A daughter of Israel could work for Yahweh, and Yahweh could work his will through a heathen. The purposes of God were not confined to Jewry, Palestine, or the Pious." (Knopf, *The O. T. Speaks.*)

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